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The Night Club Mystery

By Elizabeth Jordan



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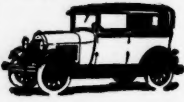
Ho-Ro-Co Quality Products are actual necessities of life, needed and used in homes everywhere, every day all the year round. Ho-Ro-Co Quality brings satisfaction and steady repeat business. That's why it's so easy to sell Ho-Ro-Co Tonic, Soap, Coffee, Tea, Spices, Extracts, Toilet Articles and Household Specialties.

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1 " " "	.50	1 Hair Tonic	.75
1 Hair Dressing	.50	1 Liniment	.50
1 Dental Cream	.30	1 Perfume	.60
1 Vanishing Cream	.30	1 Tonic	1.00
1 Rose-Leaf Jelly	.25	1 Cement	.25
1 Massage Cream	.50	1 Order Book	.05
1 Bot. Perfume	.75	1 Sample Case	2.00
1 Almond Cream	.30		
		TOTAL VALUE \$10.00	

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A Limited Vocabulary

BELINDA was a maiden
Divinely picturesque
As any child of "Aidenn"—
See Poe, in "Tales Grotesque"—
Her manners were most gentle,
Her voice was music sweet,
And I grew sentimental
When first we chanced to meet.

We danced a waltz together,
And, oh, the way we danced!
Each little foot a feather,
Across the carpet glanced.
We ogled o'er the ices,
Until my heart said: "This
Must be what Paradise is—
Superlatively bliss."

In all our conversation
We cordially agreed;
Her highest commendation
Was always: "Yes, indeed!"
I criticized, I queried—
It grieves me to confess,
I actually grew wearied
With "Yes," and "Yes, oh, yes!"

But girls that are so stupid
Oft have a pretty face;
They get the help of Cupid,
And win us by their grace.
Thought I, since she's so willing
Forever to agree,
Some day, I'll bet a shilling,
She'll answer "Yes" to me.

So at the beach last summer,
Beneath the moonlight clear,
I sought to capture from her
That affirmation dear;
But her vocabulary—
'Twas limited, and so,
Her language just to vary,
She tenderly said: "No"!

Paul Mederst



The Night Club Mystery

*Destiny spins a web that links a rural fishing trip
with underworld vengeance fourteen years later*

By Elizabeth Jordan

Author of "Miss Nobody from Nowhere," "Black Butterflies," etc.

CHAPTER I

A FATEFUL EXCURSION

THE boy was nine years old that day, and the occasion was supposed to be joyful. He had received various presents, including a

fishing rod, for which he had frequently expressed an intense desire. He was to have a special supper, with a birthday cake and something in the nature of a party. A dozen of his small friends were coming to the banquet, and there were to be games afterward.



Fish, the boy learned, object to conversation

Long hours, however, lay between the present and these delights, for it was not quite noon; so Barry Cabot hung over the gate in the picket fence that separated the grounds of his home from the village street, and, clutching his new fishing rod in a desperate grip, lent himself to black thoughts.

His grievance was a real one. The irony of possessing a fishing rod with which he was not allowed to fish was poisoning his soul. Passionately but vainly, he had pointed out the agony of this situation to the maiden aunt of fifty who was his guardian and the supreme authority of his world.

"But I didn't want it just to look at," he fiercely maintained. "I wanted it to fish with!"

Miss Marcia Cabot had appreciated the point. It was the redeeming feature of their life together that she could see a small boy's side of things. But to-day she had to make a point of her own.

"I know," she admitted. "And just as soon as we find some man or big boy that has time to go with you I'll let you fish. But Swift River is a mile off, and it's very deep in spots.

I suppose you've forgotten that Johnny Harris was drowned in the swimming hole there last summer. So there's no sense in teasing any longer—or in sniffing either," she added sternly as a betraying sound came from the small person before her. "A big boy nine years old ought to be ashamed to cry!"

"I ain't crying," Barry asserted.

"You are, too. And it won't do you any good to lie about it," his aunt announced with uncompromising New England directness.

She watched him dash a hand across his eyes, and her own eyes softened.

"You just play around now and have a nice time," she added mildly. "Perhaps to-morrow Mr. Brown or George Kerr will take you fishing. I'll arrange with one of them to do it to-day if I can get him," she ended as she walked back toward the house.

Brown was the part time gardener employed by his aunt, and George Kerr was wood chopper, furnace man, and general utility aid, working for Miss Cabot for fifty cents an hour when he did not happen to be working for any of her neighbors.

It was always hard to secure the

services of either man for the actual needs of the place, and Barry remembered that more than a day's notice was usually needed. He realized, however, that either man would rather fish at hour rates than work, and a dim ray of hope penetrated the general gloom of his outlook.

Barry stared up and down the wide old village street. Perhaps some big boy would come along. But there wasn't much chance of that. It was harvest time, and most of the big boys were working on near-by farms.

Suddenly his roving eyes focused on a figure that came swinging toward him. It was a man's figure, admirably dressed, finely carried, and wholly unfamiliar to the lad who knew every one in the small community. He must be some city man, probably from Boston, in Wheaton on business. To his surprise the stranger turned in toward the gate.

"Hello, kid. Is the hotel on this street?"

"Yes, sir. It's about a block from here, round that first corner. But they don't have dinner till half past twelve."

"I bet they don't," the man agreed. He added gloomily: "I bet they don't really have it then."

"Oh, yes, they do," Barry corrected. "They have it from half past twelve till two, an' it's most roast beef, or roast pork an' apple sauce, an' apple pie, an' it costs a dollar."

"A bargain at the price, I'm sure," the man said with restored serenity. He looked at the new rod.

"Going fishing?"

"No, sir." Barry had forgotten for a blessed moment his corroding sense of injustice, but now it returned. "My aunt won't let me." He added with a bitterness terrible in one so young: "No one has time to take me, and she

thinks if I go alone I'll fall into the river!"

The man laughed. Then, at Barry's expression, he sobered. He realized the presence of tragedy. He took the jointed rod from the boy's hand and examined it.

"Good rod," he said admiringly. "New, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir. I just got it this morning for my birthday. I guess Mr. Miller, the man that sells them, helped Aunt Marcia to pick it out. She don't know nothing—anything, I mean," he hastily corrected, "'bout fishing rods."

The man smiled, a singularly understanding smile.

"It's pretty hard luck," he remarked, "to have a new fishing rod and a birthday and not be able to fish—especially on a day like this. It's just the right weather for fishing," he added, glancing at the overclouded sun.

The boy nodded, and his lips set.

"Yes, I told Aunt Marcia that. I told her," he passionately repeated. "And there's lots and lots of fish up in Swift River. I could have brought home a big string for supper. But Aunt Marcia won't let me go alone," he added without hope, "and no one has time to go with me."

"I might have time," the newcomer suggested, his eyes still on the boy's face. "Think I'd do?"

"Oh-h-h!" Barry said.

It was all, but it was enough. The man pulled open the gate from which the boy had stepped down in his excitement.

"We'll see what Aunt Marcia says," the godlike being suggested, and strode along the flagged path that led to the front door of the Colonial house, looking approvingly at borders of old-fashioned flowers as he went. At the left there was a garden with a glimpse

of bird baths, bird houses and rustic benches under the elms and maples that seemed to have stood guard over the house for centuries.

"Nice old place," the man murmured. He was deliberately loitering now to look around him.

"I guess," Barry restively suggested, "we'll go to the kitchen door. Aunt Marcia's always in the kitchen in the morning."

"I've got a better idea," his new friend told him. "Suppose I wait in the garden while you go in and ask Aunt Marcia to come out there? I haven't seen a garden like this for a long time."

The stranger made for the nearest rustic bench. Barry saw him sit down on it and remove his Panama hat. Then he himself hustled excitedly into the house, and as soon as he had stammered out his message, was shot upstairs to wash his hands and clean up generally while his aunt looked into the matter of the man's credentials.

A little later he heard Aunt Marcia explain the situation to Praisever Reed, for twenty years her maid of all work.

"His name's Bleecker — J. C. Bleecker — and he came here this morning on business," she explained. "He's been to Judge Cummings's office and completed his business, and now he can't get away till the six fifteen train. I telephoned the judge, and he says that as far as he knows, Mr. Bleecker is all right. I suppose time is heavy on his hands, and I'm glad enough to have him take that child fishing if he's a mind to. He wanted to go back to the hotel and get a lunch box, but I told him I thought you and I could put up a better lunch than the Wheaton House any day. So we'll give them plenty of sandwiches and hard-boiled

eggs and some cold chicken and pickles and that fresh apple pie and some of the cookies we made for Barry's birthday. And we'll fill one thermos bottle with coffee for Mr. Bleecker and the other with milk for Barry, and I think they'll make out."

Barry's great adventure really began with that lunch, for he and his new friend ate it as soon as the local trolley car had dropped them at the proper willow-shaded nook on Swift River.

It was clear that this amazing stranger appreciated Wheaton's best fishing grounds, even if he didn't like Wheaton itself. It was here, however, that he made the first of various remarks which the ecstatic youngster could not wholly follow.

"Never let them convince you, old man," he told the boy as they finished their apple pie, "that virtue is its own reward. It has others. If I hadn't followed my altruistic impulse to take you fishing, I'd have been at this very minute forcing a Wheaton House meal into my outraged stomach instead of giving it this banquet for the gods."

Barry gathered that the stranger liked the luncheon, and he grinned rapturously. The boy's mouth and heart were too full for reply.

Later J. C. Bleecker lay on the ground smoking, while Barry removed his shoes and stockings. The little boy's feet were very brown. So were his legs, as far as the knees. Above that they were white. J. C. surveyed them with interest.

"Your aunt lets you run around with bare feet a good deal, doesn't she?"

"Yes, sir," said Barry. "Aunt Marcia lets me do lots of things I want to do. She feels re-sponsible to my dead father and mother."

They had a wonderful afternoon.

They did not talk much after the business of the day really began. Fish, Barry learned, object to conversation even of the most interesting kind. When the boy had been well instructed, and had started to pull in the fish, his companion took a little nap under one of the old willows that overhung the river. But later, while they were cleaning the catch, the man got a fairly accurate picture of the boy's home life and problems.

"It's pretty tough for a youngster like you to be brought up by an old maid," he reflected aloud; and, hurriedly attempting to soften the speech, was reassured by Barry's casual response.

"That's what Aunt Marcia says."

"I'm glad she sees it," his companion murmured as he selected another brook trout for cleaning.

"She sees lots of things," the boy testified. "The only thing she just simply can't see," he gloomily added, "is that sometimes boys have to fight."

"I guess you'll have to have a straight talk with her some day," J. C. Bleecker advised. "Tell her, very respectfully, of course, that boys must decide some things for themselves. Make her see that there are boys in every school that simply have to be licked."

"Yes, sir," Barry agreed. He added virtuously: "I've licked two in our school already. But it made Aunt Marcia feel terrible."

The boy's soul expanded in this atmosphere of perfect companionship. If Barry had had a father—which he hadn't had since he was a baby—he'd have liked him to be exactly like this man.

Suddenly J. C. Bleecker took out his watch and looked at it. Barry thought

they had been fishing only about half an hour, and even Bleecker was surprised to discover how late it was.

"By Jove!" he cried. "We'll have to be going if I'm to get that train. And you say you've got a birthday party on, too."

"I wish you'd stay and come to my party," Barry said wistfully. His heart contracted at the thought of losing this friend. But the friend shook his head and rose. Barry was impressed by his extraordinary neatness. The lunch basket was carefully repacked. All the crumbs and papers were gathered up and disposed of. Hands had been well scrubbed in the rushing stream—a detail which Barry, left to himself, might have overlooked.

"I've got to go back to the hotel and get my suitcase," J. C. Bleecker explained. "So I'll leave you at your door."

Both were rather silent on the way home, the man because he was now thinking of the business he had transacted that day, and the boy because he felt suddenly lonely and depressed.

"I wish you lived here," he said at last.

His companion understood. He always understood. That was the nicest thing about J. C. Bleecker.

"I can't say I share that wish, old chap," he admitted. "But I hope we'll meet again some day. Perhaps we shall. Good-by."

He held out his hand as to a pal.

"I've had an awfully good time," the boy faltered. "I—I'll never forget it. Thank you for taking me fishing."

"That's all right. I've had a good time, too. Good luck, old man."

It was growing dark. A wind had risen, and the sun was sinking luridly behind heavy storm clouds. The two

companions looked at each other through a spectral light. A rumble of distant thunder came to them, and a sudden blinding streak of lightning zigzagged across the sky.

It was all, in a strange way, prophetic of what was to come—and both recalled it long afterward. They were to meet again, and were eventually to pass together the most tragic hours of J. C. Bleecker's life.

In this hour, however, no foreboding touched them. The man waved his hand and hurried off to escape the rainfall that was just beginning. The boy, looking very small and forlorn in the gathering storm, stood by the gate, staring after the disappearing figure as long as he could see it.

CHAPTER II

BARRY AND JANET

BARRY CABOT had every excuse for being conventional. For one, he had been "brought up" by a New England maiden aunt: and though he had repudiated her too feminine influence at the age of nine, and had quietly and steadily fought against it until she died, during his senior year at Harvard, it had nevertheless enveloped him like an atmosphere throughout that period.

Marcia Cabot had been a spinster of intelligence and character. When her only brother's orphan infant was left in her care she accepted the responsibility willingly but humbly.

She gave Barry love and justice, and the child who can count on those things is not badly off, however strongly he and his guardian may differ concerning such matters as personal neatness, good manners, and fights with other boys.

"Every day on my knees I ask God's help in guiding you, Barry," she told him on the occasion of his first serious revolt, which occurred the morning following his ninth birthday.

"I hope He will help you, Aunt Marcia," Barry testified. "You see," he pointed out respectfully but firmly, "you're a woman, and God and me are men. I guess He knows boys have to decide lots of things for themselves."

That led to the establishment of a compromise fair to both sides.

Barry agreed to be reasonably clean and careful of his clothes, reasonably good mannered, reasonably punctual at meals and school, and reasonably studious. In return he demanded and obtained the privileges of choosing his own friends, though he did not put it that way, of playing with whom he pleased from the close of school up till supper time, and of basting any kid in the eye when and if, in Barry's best judgment, that kid needed such discipline.

On the whole, the compromise worked out satisfactorily; but it helps to explain why Barry Cabot grew up with habits of extreme personal neatness and excellent manners.

The influence of Aunt Marcia, and the atmosphere of the comfortable old house they occupied together, and the quiet New England town of Wheaton, as well as the conservative neighbors who dropped in for games of bridge in the evenings, and the occasional week-end visits of Colonel Jessup, on from New York, all had their part in steadying Barry.

Possibly Janet Perry may have helped a little, though this never occurred to either of them. She was a child three years younger than Barry who lived in the house next door, and

her situation was so like his own that the two children frequently marveled over it.

Janet, like Barry, lived alone with an aunt and one old servant, and she had even more personal freedom than the boy had. At the age of eight she was not very pretty, and had what Barry privately described to Aunt Marcia as a "kind of a wind-milly look" of waving arms and legs.

Barry played with her condescendingly on the occasions when none of his pals showed up. He was impressed by her pluck and her ability as a tree climber.

Aunt Marcia liked Janet, but she did not wholly approve of Janet's aunt, whose name was Mrs. Perry, and who, Aunt Marcia had been told, was the wife of the dead brother of Janet's father.

Mrs. Perry spent most of her time reading novels, which she got from Wheaton's circulating library, or had sent to her from Boston. Her neglect of "that poor child," Aunt Marcia maintained, was appalling.

Janet was singularly fortunate in that she had a father, though it appeared that she never saw him. He lived in South America, and built railroads and bridges. He wrote Janet occasionally, and always sent her presents on her birthday and at Christmas time.

The presents were very much the same—Spanish lace scarfs and embroidered shawls and such stuff. Janet had trunks full of shawls and scarfs. They seemed to be the only gifts her father knew anything about—or perhaps they were the only things he could get in the wild places where he worked. These wild places had names like Lima and Valparaiso and Buenos Aires, which Barry knew from his

geography lessons were cities. At least, Mr. Perry's letters came from there. But perhaps he sent them over the mountains on mules.

A slight resentment against his own father for getting killed and going to heaven instead of staying on earth with his son, and against his mother for starting for heaven as soon as Barry was born, had passed away with the establishment of his personal independence at nine.

He never forgot that he owed his victory over Aunt Marcia to J. C. Bleecker, and for years he dreamed of that dazzling figure of the outer world, hoping it would some day pass his way again. In the meantime he cherished its memory and unconsciously lived his life according to a code which he hoped J. C. Bleecker would have approved.

Barry frequently asked himself what J. C. Bleecker would have said and done in this or that crisis confronting the boy; and on one occasion, when the crisis seemed really vital, Barry even called on Judge Cummings in the hope of getting Mr. Bleecker's address and writing to him. Barry was fifteen now, and there seemed no reason why he should not do this.

But Judge Cummings was disappointing. He had not had a letter from Bleecker for almost five years, and that—the judge was good enough to look over his files, as Barry was a friend of his—was written in a New York hotel, which was doubtless merely Bleecker's temporary stopping place.

Barry let the matter drop; but the memory of Bleecker never fell into that pool of oblivion into which so many childish episodes, important at the time, are tossed.

Bleecker was responsible for the supreme day of his childhood. For years

he dreamed of it—sometimes as often as twice a month—and though later he fished in many places and with many different companions, he never lost the conviction that J. C. Bleecker had given him the best fishing of his life.

CHAPTER III

THE LADDER OF SUCCESS



JANET PERRY had come to live in Wheaton when she was six. By the time Barry left for college, which was when he was seventeen, she had improved a great deal. She was dressing better, for one thing, and in the words of Aunt Marcia was exercising "a more refining feminine influence" on Barry.

If she was, Barry did not know it. He was devoted to Janet—as devoted as if she had been his sister—but he hadn't much time to think about her or other girls. He was very busy getting ready for college, and the years, and Aunt Marcia, and the persistent influence of J. C. Bleecker had shaken him down into the conservative youth most of the Cabots had been.

He meant to be a man—a regular man, of the J. C. Bleecker type. That meant being strong, steady, rather quiet and very successful. He was already steady enough to satisfy even Aunt Marcia Cabot.

He had decided to be a banker and a financier. He was helping Aunt Marcia in the matter of her investments, though his help consisted in keeping her accounts and in leaving her investments where they were—in safe, gilt-edged stocks and bonds. No wildcat schemes or get rich quick notions.

During Barry's senior year at Harvard, his aunt, indomitable of soul, as

incessantly active of body as her ancestors had been, and with every apparent chance of living eighty or ninety years as they had done, suffered a stroke and died in forty-eight hours.

During a day and night when Marcia Cabot's fighting heart continued to beat, despite the assertion of her doctors that it could work only a few hours at the most, and might cease at any moment, Janet remained with Barry in the sick room. She had been a tower of strength through the entire ordeal. Even her aunt, Mrs. Perry, had revealed unsuspected powers of sympathy and helpfulness.

It was Janet, more than the nurses, who smoothed the way of the dying woman to the gates of death; and Barry never forgot the hours in which he and Janet sat in the big, strangely silent room, watching Marcia Cabot's face fall first into the peaceful lines of deeper unconsciousness and finally into the majestic repose of death.

The Perrys took Barry home with them after the funeral, and Janet had been amazingly understanding that last evening, he thought, for a girl of seventeen.

"You don't know how queer it seems," the twenty-year-old boy brought out as they sat alone together after supper before the fire in the Perry living room, "to know there's absolutely no one in the world now that belongs to me."

"Yes, I do," Janet told him. "I know, because I have that feeling so much myself. Father is always so far away, and Aunt Anne is so vague and so absorbed in books that sometimes she hardly counts. I'm horribly lonely almost all of the time. Miss Cabot was my only real friend here. Now that she's gone I shall feel worse than ever. She was always so good to me,"

she broke out with a little gulp. "I went to her with lots of things I couldn't talk over with Aunt Anne."

Barry looked at Janet, and strange new thoughts stirred in him. She was wonderfully pretty. He seemed to be conscious of her beauty for the first time, though he had observed it during vacations. That shining, reddish hair of hers was stunning, so were the brown eyes and perfect skin that went with it. And she had a lovely mouth, and the kind of a smile—

The youth sighed and pulled himself together. He was depressed and lonely. Janet had stood by like a trump, but he was getting too sentimental. It was part of his present code not to be interested in girls just now. Time enough for them later. He had observed how they messed up the lives of fellows who took them seriously too soon.

When he said good-by to Janet, however—he was leaving on an early morning train—he took both her hands and held them.

"I can't talk about it, Jan, but I'll never forget what you've done for me," he said chokily.

The tear-filled brown eyes she turned up to him were lovely. There was a new look in her face—a soft radiance, despite those quivering lips which she was forcing to smile.

"It was good of you to let me help," she said in a very low voice. "I wanted to, so terribly. It would have broken my heart if you had shut me out."

She hastened to change the subject.

"Are you really going to make your start in New York, Barry?"

"Yes. In October. Colonel Jessup is going to get me a job in some big bank. He has a lot of influence, and I don't mind letting him give me a fair

start. After that I want to win by myself."

Barry spoke absently. Ordinarily her question would have started him on a monologue, but now he was thinking of that new look on Jan's charming face.

"Good-by," he said. He kissed her gently on each cheek. "Good-by," he repeated, and hurried out of the house. It was hard to leave her, but probably that was because he so dreaded going back to his own home.

That night he lay awake for hours, trying to face life without Marcia Cabot to come home to, and thinking of Jan. Dear Jan! She was lonely, had always been lonely, she had told him; but loneliness was a new experience for Barry.

He and Janet had never kept up a vigorous correspondence. He wrote her the week of his return to college, and several times after that. She always answered his letters; but when he realized that the correspondence had ceased, he was not sure which of them had dropped it.

When he was graduated from Harvard in June, and came back to Wheaton to close his empty house and pay a final visit to Marcia Cabot's grave before sailing for Europe for his last long vacation, Janet and her aunt had given up the house next door and gone away. He was sorry to hear this, but not excited. He was leaving Wheaton himself.

He was not excited even when he heard from Praisever Reed that the Perrys had gone to New York, where he would see them soon. Janet, he learned, had developed a voice, and wanted to study singing. They had left their address with her, Praisever told him, but she had laid it down somewhere and it had lost itself.

Barry pensioned off Praisever, sold the Cabot place, kept the beautiful old furniture, and had it carefully packed and stored, then sailed for Europe.

His aunt's death had still further sobered him and had crystallized his earlier determination. He had settled down into a very conventional young man indeed, as well as an extremely ambitious one. His plan was to go straight on up. He had gone straight on up at college, and had devoted so much time to that steady ascent that he had no doubt missed other things.

The articles of his creed were strung on a cable of self-control. Work, he had decided, was the big interest, the one best bet. No fights, no drinking bouts for him. No racketing, either, and not too many friendships. Friendship took a lot of time. He was intimate with three or four fellows, and cordial with dozens, but they all took care not to be too pervasive.

He believed in plenty of gymnasium work, because it helped to keep him fit, and because J. C. Bleecker had emphasized the importance of fitness. Barry had gone in for boxing, and had kept it up, mindful of that talk on that never to be forgotten ninth birthday.

He was a big chap, a six-footer, with superb muscles and the slender waist of a ring champion. Those muscles would help him to get on and up. It was not among his plans to be bumped off by heart failure when he was in his forties.

He came back from Europe, accepted a modest position in a big New York bank, and worked so hard that within two years he had his name on a brass plate in front of a small cage. It wasn't a very important cage. There were many like it in the big bank, and many brass plates similar to his. But he was undoubtedly moving up. In

the meantime he was nothing if not methodical.

He rose at seven every morning, took his setting-up exercises, and bathed and dressed with what is frequently referred to as "meticulous care." He ate breakfast, consisting of half a grapefruit or an orange, two boiled eggs, two slices of toast, and a small pot of coffee with a big pitcher of hot milk.

After breakfast Barry walked to his office—a little matter of two miles and a half; and after a luncheon consisting of a baked apple, a sandwich, and a glass of milk, he walked another mile and a half.

On this second excursion, as the bank was well down town, he indulged himself a trifle, walking to the Battery, or to the river wharfs, or to the regions of the big public markets to study local settings and types. He was interested in types, and felt sure that all he learned about them would be useful later.

Two evenings a week he went to a gymnasium to keep up his boxing. Once a week, on Saturday night, he went to a theater. Other evenings he remained in his sitting room, reading and studying. Except on Saturday nights, he was in bed and asleep by eleven o'clock. Saturday it was often midnight, and he made up for this by an hour's additional sleep on Sunday morning.

He put in Saturday afternoons wandering about the city, and Sundays in the country, getting back to New York in time to dine with Colonel Jessup, who lived alone in a big old house on Washington Square.

Altogether it was a conservative life the young man lived. No clock could have beaten it in regularity. In one way it seemed a pity when, with little

or no preparation, he was shot out of it—at first with a suddenness that surprised him and later with a violence that appalled.

The change was almost as cataclysmic as if he were a passenger on a ship that was torpedoed without warning. He did not see the white line made by the speeding torpedo as it cut toward him through the water, and perhaps this was just as well. If he had seen it coming he would undoubtedly have tried to avoid it, and then he would have missed the most unsettling, the most incredible, the most racking and the most important experiences of his life.

CHAPTER IV

THE WHOOPEE GIRL



HE first slight upheaval was caused by the reappearance of Janet Perry. Barry had wondered where she and her aunt were living in New York, and had looked in the city directory and the telephone book for their address. Neither contained it, and as he turned disappointedly from these sources of information he felt he had done his best.

Evidently if the Perrys were in New York they lived in a hotel or club. Some day he'd run across them—one always did run across friends sooner or later—and of course he'd be delighted to see them again. Janet had been a beauty the last time he saw her in Wheaton.

He wondered restively why Janet didn't look him up. She could easily do so. His name and address were in the city directory and in the telephone book. He finally decided that she wasn't much interested, and the thought hurt.

His address was a good one. He was in the East Fifties, just off Fifth Avenue, in a building which looked like the private home of a multimillionaire, but which its owner had made over into small apartments. A wall separated its tiny front plot from that of the next house, and its entrance was protected by an elaborate and ornamental iron grille. A manservant in rather too gorgeous livery opened the door when callers rang, and the hall looked luxurious.

Barry's apartment—the rear one on the second floor—consisted of a kitchenette, a bathroom, and a good sized sitting room with a day bed in it that had the effect of a couch. He had turned the kitchenette into a dressing room, and he kept his chests and clothes there. His sitting room was handsomely furnished, and he had a private telephone and an open fireplace in which he burned hickory logs.

This accommodation in that neighborhood cost him his entire salary at the bank, but the detail did not disturb him. He was now in control of his generous inheritance from his father, and had also come into possession of Marcia Cabot's collection of stocks and bonds.

What did disturb him slightly were the persistent singing exercises and the numerous parties of a young person who occupied the front apartment of his floor.

She practiced scales and exercises in the mornings, while he was bathing and dressing and breakfasting—and this he did not mind so much. She also sang robustly, and had parties in the evening when he was reading and studying, and this annoyed him. He did not care for music, and knew nothing about it; and he wished the girl would take an occasional night off.

Quite suddenly, one Sunday morning in the spring, after she had been in the house all of Barry's second winter in New York, he met the girl in the lower hall. He had sometimes asked himself why they did not meet there or on the staircase, but remembered

ing this tribute which did not please him. "Then we could give it the once-over and know who's here. But that's against the traditions of this place, which the agent fondly imagines are those of a private house."

"It's the worst possible taste to ask about one's neighbors," Janet confirmed. "We learned that right away.



It was Janet, his musical and noisy neighbor

that her comings and goings were at hours different from his own. Facing now a charming though somewhat overdressed young girl, he discovered first that it was Janet, and, next, when they had clasped hands and exclaimed awhile, that it was his musical and noisy neighbor.

"And you're the lad next door!" Janet was looking at him with delight in her brown eyes. "Oh, Barry! Aunt Anne and I have often wondered who you were, and marveled over the atmosphere of sanctity that clung around your apartment."

"They ought to have a list of tenants in the hall," Barry smiled, ignor-

The privacy of the tenants is something the general is prepared to die for."

"The general?"

"Yes, the man down in the hall. Haven't you taken in his uniform? I hope he gets a lot of comfort out of it," Janet went on, "for his life must be a sad one. He moves like a snail, so every one in the house is constantly finding fault with him. And he speaks so slowly that no one ever lets him finish a sentence."

Barry did not answer. He was taking in the change in Janet. She had hardened — had become too sophisticated. Moreover, her sophistication, like her painted face and her too elaborate wardrobe, suggested the stage and night clubs, rather than that of more conservative circles.

He began to understand her parties. They broke up soon after eleven, and the guests trooped noisily downstairs, apparently — judging from their conversations—headed for other delights, and taking their hostess with them. He recalled Aunt Marcia's grave predictions of what would happen to "that poor child" as a result of Mrs. Perry's incessant novel reading and general neglect of her niece.

"Is Aunt Anne with you?" he asked. He was still holding Janet's hands. Now, realizing this, he let them go. Notwithstanding the changes in her, he was amazed at the pleasure it gave him to see her again.

"Look here," he cried eagerly, "it's Sunday, and I was just on my way to the station to take a train to the country. I'll stay in town if you'll lunch with me."

"That sounds like Barry of Wheaton," Janet laughed. "You always appreciated the value of your society to others, big boy." She laughed again when the young man proceeded to be still more like Barry of Wheaton. "I won't have to ask Aunt Anne, too, will I?" he inquired with an apprehensive glance toward the staircase. "We've got so much to talk about," he added more sedately.

Janet eliminated Aunt Anne with a care-free wave of a hand.

"Of course you won't. She started a new mystery story this morning, and it will hold her till night."

"Then you'll come?"

"I'll tell the world I'll come. But we can't eat yet," Janet pointed out. "It's only a couple of hours since I ate a whole omelet."

"All right. Let's take a walk in the park first. That will give us an appetite."

They walked up the Avenue to the entrance of Central Park, and strolled along the paths.

"The last time I saw you," Janet said suddenly, "was the night of Miss Cabot's funeral."

Barry nodded. The gloom of that memory settled over him so obviously that Janet saw it fall.

"She was a good old scout," Janet hurried on, her voice softening. "Every time I needed her she came across like a ferryboat. Just before she had her stroke she gave me a letter to old Colonel Jessup, to use if I came to New York. I had talked that over with her. It seems the colonel is one of New York's best and brightest now."

"Yes, and he's mighty kind to me, too. Odd he didn't tell me you were here." Barry frowned over the mystery of this.

"He doesn't know where I live now. I didn't trouble him after the first year. And of course he doesn't approve of my way of life."

"Why doesn't he? What is your way of life, Jan?"

She gave him a quick side glance.

"Not the way of guilty splendor, I assure you, so don't look so serious."

Barry frowned.

"It's odd Colonel Jessup didn't at least tell me you were in New York," he complained. "I dine with him every Sunday night."

"He's forgotten it," Janet suggested forgivingly.

"You left Wheaton soon after Aunt

Marcia died, didn't you?"

"Yes, I couldn't stand it without her, and I wanted to get to the big town. I'm really on the singing job, Barry, and I like it."

That was depressing, too, for now she talked a lot about music. But when they reached the lake, and the swans and the boats, they talked of other things, principally of other days—childhood days in Wheaton. They were sitting side by side on one of the benches by that time, and she gave him a quick side glance.

"You're rather stunning, big boy," she murmured. "But then, I always knew you would be."

"You've developed into a sort of fairy princess yourself," Barry said, looking at her admiringly.

He didn't like the painted cheeks and lips, nor the Broadway diction, but he knew that lots of nice girls went in for them nowadays.

"It's great to have this reunion," she went on.

He was feeling that way, too. It was mighty good to be with her. They had a gay luncheon and took another walk. Barry talked about himself then, and about his work. He let her see what he was heading for.

"When shall we meet again?" she asked as they parted at her door at six o'clock; and as he hesitated she added quickly: "You're not going to let me down, are you, now that we've got the blinders off at last?"

"Of course I'm not. But you can't play the bereft maiden with me. I've heard you and your little playmates lift the roof too often. However, suppose you save next Saturday evening for me. We'll dine and see a play—anything you like."

He could see that she was disappointed. A week seemed a long way

off. But she left him with a casual "All right," and he strode back to his own door, whistling.

It was fine to see her again, but of course he mustn't let her interfere too much with his work. Unconsciously he was already returning to the attitude of their childhood days. He'd play with her when he had nothing else to do.

But he thought of her that night and several times during the following day, which was doing very well for him; and he saw much more of her that spring and summer than he had expected to.

For one thing it was a hot summer—too hot for much night reading; and for another Janet decided to stay in town up till August, as her singing teacher was going abroad then, and would keep his studio open till he sailed. She and Barry often went to the beaches on hot nights.

"You ought to be in love with some nice chap by this time," Barry bromidically observed on one of these occasions.

"One!" Janet jeered. "Where would I get with one these days?" she added complacently. "I've got one for every dress and every mood."

"How many does that make?" He was intrigued by this up-to-date position.

"Oh, five or six regulars and a few sporadics. They're harmless pups. All they ask is a saucer of milk two or three times a week—at some night club. Not one of them has the price of it himself, of course," she added cheerfully. "You ought to meet some of them, Barry. They'd brighten you up. You're too serious."

Barry shook his head.

"Don't you risk anything of that kind," he advised. "I might get ab-

sent-minded and step on a few of them."

Later, and with the fine candor of Barry of Wheaton, he further emphasized his dislike of her new friends.

"Don't ask me to waste my time on that gang," he begged when she tried to lure him to her parties. "I'd consider it a murder of a minute to look at one of them."

She glanced at him quizzically.

"You're really something of a prig, Barry."

She spoke in the tone and manner of the Janet Perry who had come back from a good finishing school. It was one of her attractions for him that she still gave him very frequent glimpses of that Janet. She had a dual personality, and he was never sure which side she would turn to him.

But the best feature of their new association was that Janet never really interfered with his work or with anything else he cared to do. She was on hand when he wanted her, and out of the way when he didn't—the ideal conditions of the old days.

It became clear that she treated her "gang," as she called it, with a surprising lack of consideration. She dropped it at his slightest hint that he might have a free evening, though she always made it clear to him that this was because she was eager for a change from the pups and lounge lizards she eliminated so informally.

These, Barry decided later, were really harmless youths, weak and worthless, but not vicious; and the girls in her group—there were only two or three of them—seemed reasonably self-respecting young persons.

He got his impressions of them all from Janet's talk. Her special chum, it appeared, was a certain Verna Morris, head hostess of a fashionable night

club known as "Jake's." Barry met Miss Morris once or twice, and liked her. She was a fine and breezy type, to whom every girl who knew her apparently went with her troubles.

In August Janet left town, and Barry missed her more than he had expected to. But he took his vacation late that month—went off on a western trip with one of his old chums at Cambridge; and soon after he got back in September the person appeared who really did eventually upset his cherished routine.

CHAPTER V

J. C. BLEECKER REAPPEARS

IT all began so simply that no young man who was stepping briskly toward the heaven of professional success, and whose entire attention was given to his step, could be expected to realize what was happening to him. One minute he was nodding affably to a depositor standing outside his cage, and known to him only by sight; the next moment that depositor was knocking his routine into a cocked hat.

"It's one o'clock," the gentleman pleasantly remarked, after a quick glance around which showed him there was no one else within hearing. "I've noticed that you go out to lunch at one. How about taking a bite with me?"

Barry stared. Then he smiled. The depositor, whose name was Brian Strong, seemed all right, even from the constricted point of view of a young assistant teller in a cage. Brian Strong had a fine standing balance in the bank, kept his accounts in excellent shape, and asked no favors from anybody. All his deposits were in

cash, and they were sizable ones. To-day's, for example, was thirty-eight thousand seven hundred dollars.

Strong was sound, and he looked it. There was a captain of industry set to his jaw, and a keen look in his brown eyes that Barry admired. He was a handsome man, and his white hair gave him an effect of distinction.

"I'd like to," Barry said promptly. "Give me five minutes and I'll be with you."

"I'll meet you outside between here and Broadway."

Barry was almost excited when he closed his cash drawer, left his cage, and heard the cage door lock behind him as he hurried into the wash room. He hadn't lunched with any one but Janet for several months, and suddenly he wondered why.

Even as he wondered he knew. He had invited no one, and up till to-day no one had invited him. He realized that his bank associates thought him a bit "up stage," but the fact did not interest him. He knew he wasn't "up stage"; he simply preferred to go off by himself and roam where fancy led him.

However, a change was a change, and he thought well of this one—especially as Strong had interested him for months. Every time he saw the man there was something—far down in his subconsciousness a faint bell had rung—

"Where shall we go?" Strong asked as they walked toward lower Broadway.

"Anywhere you like. I usually drop in here."

Barry indicated a restaurant whose windows earnestly set forth the attractions of hot griddlecakes. Strong shook his head.

"Not good enough," he ruled, and

led the way to a pretentious and famous down town establishment.

Closeness in money matters was not one of Barry's faults, but he was somewhat dazed by the excellence of the repast his host ordered, and still more surprised by the discovery that the other's share of it consisted of two slices of whole wheat bread and a glass of buttermilk.

"All I ever eat at noon," Strong tersely explained when Barry expressed some natural interest in this Spartan repast. "To-day I'm glad of it, for I want to talk while you eat."

Barry was intrigued. This might mean anything or nothing. But if Strong had something special on his mind, he took his time in bringing it out. With a light touch and a series of interested and tactful questions, he drew from his companion the unexciting story of the latter's life and routine. At the end of it he nodded.

"In short," he said, and smiled a smile that was suddenly and almost poignantly reminiscent, "you're about the sort of chap I expected you'd develop into. But I hope you haven't stopped fighting."

Barry was so surprised that his look became a stare. The other man held his eyes. He was still smiling.

"I remember giving you some advice about fighting that day," he added.

And then, quite suddenly, the restaurant vanished and a New England stream appeared before Barry's eyes, swift flowing and rock filled and overhung by willows. On its bank an absorbed man and an ecstatic small boy fished side by side.

"By Jove!" Barry cried. He put down his knife and fork and his eyes actually stung as he spoke. "I remember now!" As the other took this in silence he added more quietly: "But

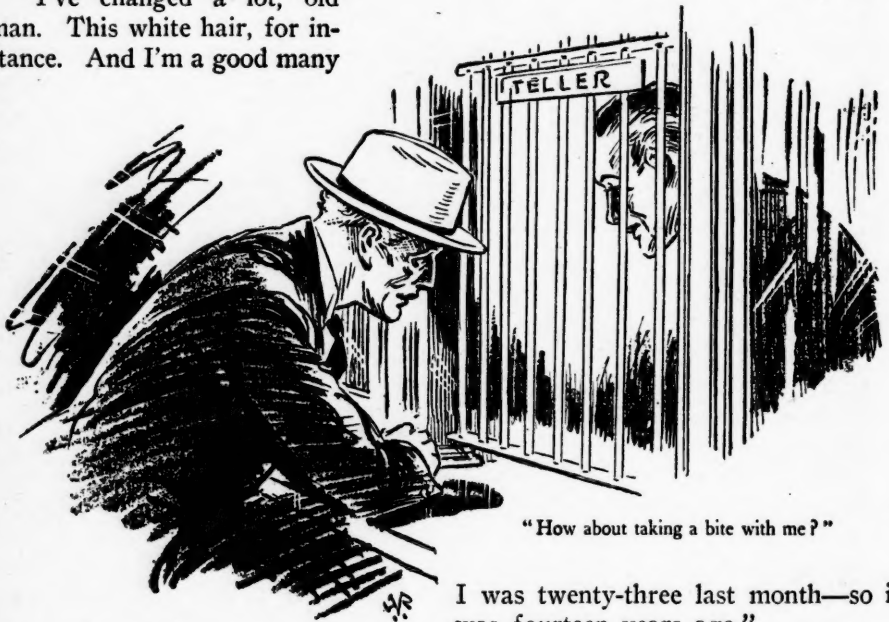
I had never forgotten. A lonely kid doesn't forget a day or a good Samaritan like that." He voiced the thought that now filled his mind. "I can't understand why I didn't recognize you from the first."

J. C. Bleecker shook his head.

"I've changed a lot, old man. This white hair, for instance. And I'm a good many

the little episode. After all, it was a long time ago. How long, by the way?" he interrupted himself to ask. "You were nine or ten at the time, weren't you?"

"Exactly nine. It was my birthday. That was part of the miracle.



"How about taking a bite with me?"

years older and twenty pounds lighter than I was that day. I had a long illness last year."

"But your name—" Barry began impetuously, and then stopped, flushing.

"Is Bleecker. Brian Strong's my professional name."

Barry wondered what that meant, but hurried into another question.

"Why didn't you speak to me the first day you came in? Or didn't you remember me then?"

"I remembered you, all right." Bleecker spoke thoughtfully, his eyes now on a morsel of bread he was molding into a tiny sphere. "I wasn't sure you'd remember either me or

I was twenty-three last month—so it was fourteen years ago."

"And you had a new fishing rod, and weren't allowed to fish with it because your aunt was afraid you might fall into the river. She was right at that," the speaker added reflectively. "Swift River was a turbulent little stream."

"I was always hoping you'd come back to Wheaton," Barry brought out. His luncheon was forgotten. He was still trying to realize that this was happening, and wondering why he felt like a little boy in the presence of this man. "I watched for you for years. In fact, I've never stopped watching."

Strong smiled again. His smile was more than ever a fascinating phenomenon, for his habitual expression was

almost grim. His smooth-shaven face had hardened a trifle with the years, but it was still an arresting and interesting face.

"I had an hour's business there, and an eight-hour wait for a train," he reminded Barry. "I never passed that way again!"

"You gave me the biggest day of my life," Barry said after a short silence, in which both had again called up the picture of the old town, the rushing river. "I've never had another like it. It was the top note of my gamut. I used to ask myself, later on, at school, and at Cambridge when something pleasant was going on: 'Does this come up to it?' But it never did."

His companion laughed out. It was the first time Barry had heard the laugh since that far-away day, and it gave him a thrill.

"You were a grateful kid."

Bleecker was still laughing, and the laugh was low, musical, and full of amusement.

"I'm still grateful. There was a big aftermath to the day. I had learned a lot. You influenced my whole life. Through your advice I even threw off Aunt Marcia's gentle yoke—the very next day."

The young man's strong shuttered face took on the boyish look which sometimes made observers wonder why they had thought Cabot "up stage." "I'd like most awfully to have a chance to do something for you!" he ended.

"I may take you up on that, sometime."

The other was still smiling, with the mildly amused air of a man of the world interested in the emotions of youth.

"I hope you will."

But Barry had no real hope that he could ever do anything for the self-sufficient and successful worldling before him. He still felt like a small boy in the presence of greatness. He was not dazzled by the quiet perfection of his companion's clothes as he had been at nine, but there was a look in Strong's eyes, and around his mouth and chin, that made a fellow only half his age feel almost tongue-tied.

"Mr. Bleecker—I beg your pardon, would you rather be called Strong?"

"If you please."

That settled it. To change the magic name of J. C. Bleecker in the very hour of their reunion called for some doing, but Barry's trained mind accomplished the feat. From that moment he began to think of J. C. Bleecker as Brian Strong.

"I was going to ask where you've been all these years, Mr. Strong? Several times I've tried to get in touch with you—once through Judge Cummings."

"Did you really?" Strong seemed pleased by this, and considered it smilingly. "I've been right here in New York a good deal of the time," he said then. "With occasional runs to Chicago and San Francisco and over to Europe, of course."

They talked, while subconsciously Barry tried to realize that this encounter was really taking place. At last he glanced at his watch and gave a spectacular start. Brian Strong had made him forget the bank! That had never happened before.

"This has been great," he said. "Thanks most awfully. But I'll have to hustle away. I'm half an hour late as it is."

"That's a compliment, all right." His host rose, too, and simultaneously nodded to their waiter. "Trot right

along," he advised Barry, as he took the check. "I'll see you again in a few days."

"Sorry to gallop like this."

But after a strong handclasp, Barry rushed off, once more the rising young banker with his feet on the road to success. His host watched him expertly winding his way in and out among tables on the journey to the door.

Even when his guest had disappeared, Strong still stood gazing at the spot where he had vanished, in a reverie so profound that a prolonged and distressing bronchial cough emanating from the waiter was required to bring him back to the financial obligations of the minute.

CHAPTER VI

DINK THE SHADOW



ARRY thought of Strong a great deal that afternoon and night and the next day. During the following week he frequently recalled him again, and wondered uneasily why he didn't show up. But notwithstanding his promise, Strong did not appear for a fortnight, and then only to make a large deposit and hurry off.

They had greeted each other cordially through the wires of the cage, but Barry felt very flat. It suddenly occurred to him that Strong might have found their reunion disappointing. The theory was strengthened when Strong continued to refrain from following it up.

Barry was chagrined, but hardly surprised. Strong was a man of the world. Undoubtedly he had hosts of friends. Why should he bother about an unlicked cub in a bank cage? At nine, as Barry recalled it, he had been a rather decent kid. At twenty-three

he was, and he knew it; developing into something of a machine—perhaps even, as Janet had suggested, into something of a prig. He had not liked that comment of hers. Probably Strong felt the prig or the machine in him, or both, and was repelled.

But Strong did not seem repelled during their second and longer meeting, which occurred a full month after the first one.

This time—one Saturday morning in late October—Strong made another deposit and, finding himself alone at the assistant teller's window for a moment, threw in his likable smile.

"You have Saturday afternoon off, don't you?" he wanted to know.

"Most of it," Barry admitted with a grin of expectation.

"It's a fine day. How about letting me run you up into Westchester in my car? We might dine at some road house there, or if you'd rather, we can come back to town and go to a play."

"There's nothing I'd like better. But"—Barry had decided it was time for him to show some reciprocity—"suppose you go dine with me?"

"Fine. Where shall we meet?"

"Anywhere you say."

"All right. I keep my roadster at the Sheldon garage." He mentioned a street and number. "Can you meet me there at four?"

"I'll be there."

Barry felt a zest of expectation he had not known since his school days. There was a return of self-confidence, too. He wasn't to be thrown down, then. Even if Strong had found him disappointing the first time, he was to be given another chance.

He was at the rendezvous on the moment. So was Strong, and the roadster was ready. The car was a beauty, one of the best, and Strong

handled it in a way that showed it had no secrets from him.

The day was as perfect in its way as the memorable fishing day of fourteen years back. Barry felt a trifle self-conscious until he met Strong's smile and heard the sigh of content with which the older man settled to his work at the wheel.

"This is great," Strong said heartily. "I'm a lonely devil, and it's good of a young chap like you to bother with me."

Barry appreciated the tact of this, but he was no longer analytical. He was simply content with a satisfying companionship. He hoped to learn more about Strong to-day, but this hope was not realized. Strong spoke of cars, of railroads, of motor trips, of cabbages and kings.

He also spoke of Barry Cabot, and listened with a sympathetic expression to the news of Marcia Cabot's death. But of Brian Strong or J. C. Bleecker he spoke not at all.

They returned to town rather early, and dined at the Ritz, afterward talking for an hour over their cigars.

"This your hang-out?" Strong asked the young man as he drew up about ten o'clock before the address Barry had given him.

"Yes. Won't you come in and have a cigar?"

"No, thanks; not to-night."

In his room Barry filled his favorite pipe and sat down for quiet reflection. Janet would be disappointed. She was back in town, now, and looking to him to stand by. He had fallen into the habit of taking her to dinner and the theater Saturday evenings, but perhaps it was just as well to have an occasional interruption of that routine. She could have another of those gay parties she liked, and dance all night

with the suitor who watched her mood and clothes. He, Barry, would take her somewhere Sunday — perhaps to the country.

Her father, he had learned from her, was still in South America, building railroads and bridges, and sending Janet photographs of them, as well as more Spanish scarfs and shawls. She admitted that by this time her collection of scarfs and shawls was probably the largest in New York, but added that they came in well for Christmas gifts.

Notwithstanding her flippancy, Barry saw that she resented her father's few letters and his persistent absence.

"After I left school I asked him if Aunt Anne and I could take a voyage to South America and give him the once-over," she admitted. "I've always wanted to see South America. But he said white women wouldn't be safe in his part of it. He sent his New York friend to explain it all to me. His pal's a good scout. I see him sometimes. He looks after dad's business interests here, and pays me my allowance. The stars in their courses have nothing on him in punctuality, and if I need a little extra he always coughs it up."

To-night Barry's thoughts did not dwell long on Janet. It was on Strong they centered, and many of them were disquieting. He had observed some puzzling things about Strong during the dinner—little personal idiosyncrasies he was not prepared to see in that finished product.

There was no question that Strong was a man of education and breeding; and he was one of the most interesting and exciting talkers Barry had ever listened to. He had been all over the world. He evidently knew Paris, Lon-

don, Berlin, Rome and Budapest as well as he knew New York. He had a sense of humor and an amazing knowledge of human nature.

Also, and to this discovery, Barry's thought constantly returned, he had a side to his nature of which the young man had caught a momentary and appalling glimpse.

It had happened at the Ritz while they were lighting cigars and watching the final bubbling of their black coffee in the glass percolater on the table before them.

A thin, dark young man in excellent evening clothes, with colorless eyes and a hard-bitten face, had suddenly pushed his way to them through the tables, with the obvious purpose of speaking to Strong.

Strong raised his glance to the newcomer's face. It was the look in Strong's eyes that Barry was recalling now, and the memory sent a chill down his spine. Never before had he seen such icy anger and—yes, there was no doubt of it—such white heat of warning as he had seen in Strong's eyes.

Under the look the thin stranger crumbled. His own eyes dropped and his whole manner became cringingly apologetic.

"Jest t'ought I'd say 'How,'" he stammered, and faded away.

The mask of Strong's face, which had been so new and terrible for a moment, changed back to the one Barry knew. He leaned forward to meet Barry's offer of a light for his cigar.

"One of the lounge lizards that goes about these places hitting every one he recognizes for a touch," he said contemptuously. "He'll try it on you the next time he sees you in public, because he'll think he met you to-night. He is known as 'Dink the Shadow.'"

Barry had murmured something in

response, and carefully refrained from looking at his host. For one thing, he didn't care to see those eyes again just yet, and for another he knew Strong was lying. The man who had come to their table so confidently was no mere acquaintance. He was a creature of Strong's, and he had come with a message.

That look he got from Strong was the sort one does not turn on an equal. It was the look with which one calls a hound to heel—and the hound had been terribly frightened by it, and had cringed flat under it. Strong had gone on talking more entertainingly than ever, and he had taken some pains to draw Barry out. This was never a hard matter, as that future financier was rarely at a loss for words.

Within ten minutes Barry was beginning to wonder whether he had not exaggerated the look in Strong's eyes. Now, alone with his pipe, he knew he hadn't. There was something queer about Strong—something back of those controlled features and that extreme personal reserve. Barry had felt it, and had fought against it in the first moments of their reunion, and now he told himself that he knew what it was. The realization was like a plunge into ice water, with none of the exhilaration that may follow that shock.

He was aroused by the ringing of his telephone bell. As he put the receiver to his ear, Strong's voice came to him.

"Old man," it said cheerfully, "I've changed my mind about that little invitation of yours. I'm down in your front hall, and if you haven't gone to bed I'll come up and smoke a cigar."

"Come right along," Barry said heartily. "I'll be delighted."

He understood what that meant. He had been sitting in the firelight, and

his guest was knocking at the door almost before he could flash on the lights. Strong breezed in, looking eager and amazingly vital. He tossed his hat and overcoat on the couch and hastened toward the fire, but he did not take the easy chair Barry was pushing toward him.

"I'll prow! about a bit, if you don't mind," he said. "Jolly quarters you've got here."

He took a cigar from the box Barry offered him, and also accepted the whisky and soda his host hastened to mix. With the glass in one hand and the cigar gripped firmly in a corner of his mouth—the latter one of the peculiarities the young man had observed during their first lunch together—he roamed about the room, stopping occasionally to take a book from the shelf, replace it after a glance, or look at a picture. Barry watched him thoughtfully. He knew exactly why the man was here, and why the man was nervous, and his own heart was heavy. Suddenly Strong stopped directly in front of his chair, swung another chair forward, and sat down in it facing him.

"I've got to make a clean breast of it," he began, and his stern face twisted into an almost deprecating smile. "I didn't want to do it just yet," he went on. "I wanted you to know me better first. But of course it wouldn't have been a square deal."

Barry waited. He would have saved the man this bad fifteen minutes if he could, but of course he couldn't. Strong, who had set his drink on a table beside him, now lit his cigar and took a puff.

"Perhaps you know already," he suddenly shot at his host.

"No one has told me anything, if that's what you mean."

"Then I'll do it myself. Hope it won't make any difference, but perhaps it will. If it does, I'll understand. You see, you're a young pillar of society, in a way, and I—well, I'm outside that sacred fold. So perhaps I shouldn't have looked you up."

The words were the most felicitous he could have chosen. Again before Barry's eyes swung the picture of the old river, the willows, the two sportsmen of long ago.

"Cards, I suppose," he suggested. Now that it was out, he could help.

"Yes, a gentleman's game—a square game. Any one you ask will tell you that."

"I'd be sure of it without being told."

Strong gave a smile of relief.

"That's mighty good of you, old man."

Evidently the admission both touched and encouraged his companion.

"Then perhaps you'll believe, too," Strong went on, "that I'm not horning into your life with any idea of drawing you into mine. What I want," he added with a sigh, "is to get away from my own occasionally, if you know what I mean."

For a moment the man's face was tragic. It was as if a guard had dropped, revealing his lonely soul.

"I think I do. You want some hours off once in a while."

The other caught him up.

"That's exactly it. But I'm not engaged in leading youth astray, and I'd do a final disappearing act right now if I thought it would hurt you socially or professionally to be seen around with me at long intervals. I can't see why it should," he went on, as if thinking it out. "Your crowd doesn't know me, and you'll never see any-

thing of my crowd. Moreover, even if I happened to be recognized by any friend of yours who saw us together he'd probably know at the same time that my reputation in my own field is all right. Any Broadway authority will tell you," he went on after a slight pause, "that I know a lot of people in the underworld. So I do. But there's nothing to my discredit in that, either, from my point of view, and you'll never meet them."

He stopped now, as if he had said all he meant to say. Barry was silent. It was so important to say the right thing. And he had never liked J. C. Bleecker — or Brian Strong — better than in that moment.

"I've always been interested in types," he began at last. The other man threw him a quick look, as if he didn't quite know what to make of the remark; but he finally took it up.

"All right," he suggested with returning assurance. "Regard me as a type."

"I will," Barry grinned. He had definitely made up his mind that Brian Strong's private life was no affair of Barry Cabot's. He liked the man — was fascinated by him — and he considered himself under lifelong obligations.

"Great. Then that's settled, and I'm glad it is. Having Dink show up at our table to-night hastened this show-down a bit, but of course I meant to have it soon, anyway. I didn't want to sail in your craft under false pretenses."

He went away soon after that, but as it turned out the talk was an excellent preparation for a little chat Barry had with the branch manager of his bank the following Monday. When that official, whose name was Howson, summoned his most promising assist-

ant into his private office, the young man went without apprehension.

CHAPTER VII

BARRY IS WARNED



ARD HOWSON was a former classmate of Barry's at Cambridge, as well as a nephew of the bank's distinguished president, Alfred E. Howson. The latter fact, in Barry's opinion, was a complete explanation of the nephew's position as branch manager. The youth had no striking business ability, and his life's vital interest was polo; but as a beginner in the banking world he modeled himself on the highest banking type he knew, and in business hours, when he could remember to do so, masked his pink, good-humored face with an imitation of his uncle's natural austerity of expression which his associates endeavored in vain to imitate.

Next to polo his interest was clothes, and his business suits, shirts and ties were the highest expression of England's best sartorial authority. When he was not being a young Napoleon of finance, Howson radiated the zest and wholesomeness of an outdoor sportsman, and Barry liked and admired that side of him. The two were close friends.

It was only when Howson chose to pose as beacon and counselor to his staff that his old classmate grew restive. Unfortunately this was to be one of those occasions, and Barry realized it as soon as he glanced at the set countenance of his superior. For the moment, indeed, young Howson was looking almost more like Uncle Alfred than Uncle Alfred looked like himself. He offered Barry a chair in a portentous manner.

"Cabot," said the branch manager, without relaxing his sternness of feature, "we think a lot of you here."

"That's very good of you," Barry grinned. He knew there was a string to the tribute.

"Yes, and I think you'll admit that we've tried to show our appreciation of your work. We've pushed you up as fast as conditions and fairness to others allowed."

Barry nodded.

"I haven't a thing to complain of," he cheerfully conceded. He was again congratulating himself on the fact that his post in the bank had come to him through Colonel Jessup, and not through Ward Howson.

"But—" Suddenly Howson leaned forward and dropped what his staff called "the old man's mug." "See here, Barry," he went on appealingly. "I hope you won't go up in the air about this, but I've got to speak to you. The fact is, I saw you dining at the Ritz Saturday night with Brian Strong."

"Did you?" Barry asked with interest. "I didn't see you."

"Yes, I did. And I saw Dink the Shadow go over to your table and speak to Strong and get the glacial glare. What I'm getting at," he went on as the young man facing him seemed waiting for this explanation, "is that Dink the Shadow and Jim Blecker, *alias* Brian Strong, aren't the best companions for a rising young banker to be seen in public with."

"Is Strong's name really Jim Blecker?"

"Supposed to be. He's said to belong to the old Blecker family—college man, black sheep, all that stuff. The point is—"

"The first point I want covered, Howson, if you don't mind, is whether

this talk is your idea or your uncle's."

"Both," said young Howson promptly. "I told Uncle Alfred about it yesterday. Had to, you understand. My job. Our most promising lad seen in bad company—that sort of thing. Sorry to do it, but had to get busy."

Barry softened. He liked Howson, classmate and polo player, as much as he deplored Howson the branch manager.

"Surely your uncle didn't take this thing seriously?" he asked.

Howson nodded.

"He did," he confessed. "And to tell you the truth, old man, I was surprised. I hadn't thought he would. Just dropped the information in passing, as it were. Wasn't sure he'd even pick it up and look at it. But, by Jove, he went after that ball as if the game depended on it. He got Strong's record within an hour—not an easy thing on Sunday. The old man has his way of getting information, though, and I'll say it's a good one. By the time lunch was over—I told him just before lunch—we had a full report on Strong that was better than Strong could have made out himself."

"I'll bet it was."

"Oh, it was straight, all right—" Howson hastened to maintain. "Dispassionate, you know. Names, dates, places, names of pals, finger-prints, trials—and a photograph that few who know him would recognize now."

"Trials!" Barry was stunned and showed it. "When and what for?"

"Yes. Two of 'em—one six, the other ten years ago. Both for gang jobs—confidence rackets. Strong seems to have been drawn into the net with several leaders of a certain gang because he occasionally ran with them. There wasn't any good evidence against him, and he was acquitted both

times. But, of course, neither episode did him any good."

"I thought he was a gambler."

"So he is, and they say he's a square one. Anyway, so far as the record goes he's never been mixed up with anything queer at cards, though he plays with the big fellows and for big money. But, like all the rest of them, he has affiliations with the thugs, and naturally he takes a chance of being drawn in when the law is after some of his little playmates. Dink the Shadow is his special jackal, they say, and he's been seen lately with Jackknife Casey and Featherbed, gangsters that have given the police many bad nights. They're henchmen of the Bosco brothers, two big figures in the underworld, and it doesn't look good for Strong to be with them."

He gave his assistant time to make a comment, but when Barry did not use it, Howson went on easily.

"They say the Jackknife gets his name because he wears knife blades in the soles of his fighting shoes, and jumps on his victims when he gets 'em down. Featherbed can gouge out a human eye quicker than any other gangster, and he wears a brass thumb tip to help him do it."

"Where did you get that stuff?" Barry was sick at heart. He had found a hero at nine; he had worshiped that hero in the secret places of his boy's heart; he had since then associated the hero with all that was finest and best in life; and now black rivers of New York sewage were roaring past his ears.

"Newspaper man—criminal courts reporter," Howson was explaining. "Knows all the dope. I asked him to dinner at the club last night because I wanted to make a few inquiries of my own. The things he told me—"

"I think he was stuffing you."

"Not a chance of it. In the first place he simply couldn't have made up the yarns he told me. No normal mind could conceive the things those thugs do. In the second place, he's Ned Wheeler, our old pal at Cambridge, winning his spurs now on daddy's newspapers. I don't know when I've been such a good listener. I kept him talking till midnight. By the way"—his face crinkled into a grin—"did you ever hear how Featherbed got his nickname?"

"Of course not. I never heard of Featherbed till to-day," Barry muttered dourly.

Howson's pink disk took on the content of the *raconteur*.

"Wheeler told me that, too. It was this way," he began, cozily settling back in his handsome swivel chair. "It seems there was a fire in one of the tenements where Featherbed and the Jackknife and two other gangsters had rooms together on the third floor. They didn't call him Featherbed then—he weighed almost three hundred pounds. I think his name is Kelly. They were cut off from the staircase by the flames, and it was quite a drop from the third-story window. The yarn goes that Kelly's three pals threw him out of the window so they could drop on him and break their fall. They did it, too, and he was in the hospital for six weeks. But he has such a forgiving nature that he killed only one of them when he came out; while he and the Jackknife are as chummy as ever."

Howson waited for a tribute, but received none from his ungrateful listener.

"All right, Howson. What are you leading up to?"

Barry spoke wearily, for the world had turned black. Howson glanced at

him and repressed an impulse to look like Uncle Alfred. The polo player who had been about to give way to the banker answered the question.

"Nothing but a friendly warning, old chap," he said earnestly. "A word to the wise, you know—that sort of thing. I needn't tell you that it doesn't look well for a youngster in your position"—he himself was exactly a year older than Barry—"to trot around with gamblers and gangsters."

Barry sat back in his chair. The face of Brian Strong swung before him, as it had looked when Brian Strong expressed his wish for a few hours off.

"All right, Howson," he said again. "That's what you and your uncle say. Now here's what I say, and I hope you'll put it to your uncle straight."

He stopped and gave himself a moment for reflection.

"I see your side of this," he went on more slowly, "and I admit that if I made a point of playing about with gamblers and gangsters it wouldn't be a good thing for me or for the bank—especially for me. On the other hand, I hold that I've worked for this bank for two years—it's just two years this month—and that I've proved I have the right to choose my own friends. I haven't the faintest idea of getting mixed up with any thugs or out-laws—"

"Then that's understood—" Howson interrupted with great relief.

"But—hold on; wait a minute." Barry raised a warning hand. "I won't let you or your uncle or anybody else dictate to me who my friends shall be or shall not be. I like the man you call Brian Strong. I like him immensely. I've known him since I was a boy. I consider myself under obligations to him. I don't intend to make myself

conspicuous by being seen with him often, and I certainly don't intend to have anything to do with his underworld associates. But if I want to eat an occasional meal or spend an occasional evening with Strong, I'm going to do it. And if that isn't satisfactory to the bank"—Barry rose to emphasize this ultimatum—"you can have my resignation."

Howson shook his head.

"How damned independent a private income makes a chap feel," he mused aloud.

Barry grinned wanly.

"There's something in that, I suppose. Just the same, my job means a lot more to me than the salary I get for it."

"I know." Howson looked up at him resignedly. "You've said exactly what Uncle Alfred said you'd say," he went on. "I didn't agree with him."

"Then you were wrong. You'll find you're usually wrong when you don't agree with Uncle Alfred," Barry added kindly as he turned toward the door. "What else did Uncle Alfred say?" he stopped to ask.

Howson hesitated.

"Do you want exactly what he said or an expurgated version?" he asked guardedly.

"I'll take it straight," Barry responded instantaneously.

"Well, then"—if Ward Howson seemed to enjoy this recital it must be remembered that his assistant had been rather curt with him a moment earlier—"he said that under your New England frosting you were a hot-blooded young ass who wouldn't stand dictation, and that you'd probably hang yourself if we gave you enough rope. I didn't agree with him about that, either," Howson ended.

But here again, as Barry Cabot later realized, Uncle Alfred was right.

CHAPTER VIII

VERNA OFFERS SOME ADVICE



It became clear that what he mentally characterized as "heart talks" were indicated for Barry that season, for a third chat soon followed his intimate interviews with Strong and Ward Howson.

This time it was Jan's friend Verna Morris who breezed into his sitting room one night in November and relieved her mind.

Being a highly unconventional young woman, and having some doubt as to Cabot's willingness to receive her, Miss Morris dispensed with the aid of such preliminaries as telephoning or sending up a card. She gained the young man's presence by the simple expedient of rapping on his portal.

"Just blew out of Jan's joint next door," she cheerfully explained as he opened the door and tried to conceal his surprise at finding her on his threshold. "If you can spare a minute I got an earful for you."

Barry assured Miss Morris that his entire life was at her disposal, whereupon Verna gave him a lustrous glance and followed him to an easy chair drawn up to the fireplace.

"You're sure good to yourself," she commented as she threw off her coat, accepted a cigarette, lit it at the lighter he held for her, and relaxed agreeably in the big chair. She looked around the comfortable room. "'From me to me with my love,' seems to be your slogan, all right. 'Course you know," she added severely, "that luxury like this at the beginnin' of your c'reer ain't goin' to get you nowhere."

"Is that what you came to tell me?"

Barry asked the question with a grin. Miss Morris amused him.

"Nope, I just threw that in for good measure. I got a kind heart."

The caller sent forth a series of beautiful smoke rings and gave herself a moment for open admiration of them. She had suddenly discovered that it was not as easy to give this young man an earful as she had expected it to be. He was there with the supplies and the polish, all right, but he had a disconcerting air of expecting her to get down to brass tacks. She finally did so.

"Why don't you stage a rescue act?" she suddenly demanded. "Why don't you get busy an' take Jan away from that outfit she's runnin' with?"

"I'm not my brother's keeper, you know."

Barry was not surprised by her opening gun. He had suspected that she was here to talk about Janet.

"Now who said anything about your brother?" Miss Morris was annoyed, and showed it. "I'm talkin' about Janet Perry. She's one of the best, an' she's really int'rested in what she calls her music, though Gawd knows it don't sound like music to me," the speaker dispassionately threw out in passing. "But mebbe it is. Anyway, it's a damned sight better for her than the night clubs an' the loose ankle boys she's murderin' the rest of her hours with."

"It's odd to hear you slam the night clubs," Barry observed. "Aren't you one of their best and brightest ornaments?"

"Sure I am. I'm a crown jool," his visitor admitted. "But Jake's club is the best of the lot when it comes to the Sunday school test. No rough stuff, no pocket pickin', no little pri-



"Why don't you stage a rescue act?" Miss Morris demanded

vate rooms for two, no knock-out drops, no ethyl or lethal in the booze. Any one 'd tell you that. Jake don't want to bump off our guests. He wants 'em to live an' come again. He's married, an' he lives in a flat on the upper East Side, an' he's got two kids an' a wife that's all to the good. His baby's six months old—an' is he cute! Say, that kid can blow twenty bubbles a minute!"

She meditated on this achievement for a moment and then went on.

"Believe me or not, Jake's wife ain't never seen the inside of a night club. They ask me to dinner 'bout once a month, an' do I go? I go with bells on."

Barry admitted that Jake's record, as here given, was superb.

"He does things for folks, too," the *raconteuse* continued. "Listen. A few years ago a girl come here from Chicago that 'd lost her mem'ry. She didn't know who she was or anything about herself. Jake give her a job—she could dance all right—an' he kinda looked after her till she straightened

herself out. She turned out to be some one mighty important, and every time she comes to New York she an' her husband gives a big party at Jake's. They've sent most of Chicago to Jake's club, too," she ended appreciatively.

Having finished her cigarette, Miss Morris accepted another, but refused a drink. She was on her way to Jake's and her nightly duties, and a municipal Christmas tree fully illumined would have seemed a somber thing beside her. Barry wondered what Alfred E. Howson would think of her if he should glance into the room at the moment. The reflection made him laugh out. His caller looked pleased and then suddenly thoughtful.

"Mebbe I'm keepin' you from something," she observed.

"No. I'm not going anywhere. Saturday's about my only night out."

"I know. The bright boy of the bank. Hits the hay at 10.31 P.M., an' has his daily dozen every mornin' at seven thirty-six. Eats what's good for his little tummy an' always thinks pious thoughts."

"Where did you get that idea?" Barry spoke coldly.

"From a little boid. But what I'm callin' your attention to," Miss Morris added firmly, at last returning to the object of her visit, "is that Jan Perry ain't doin' none of those things."

"I don't see what I can do about it," Barry restively pointed out.

"You're her friend, ain't you?"

"Yes, I am."

"Well, don't that mean somethin'?"

"It doesn't mean that I have any right to butt into her private affairs."

Verna grinned her gamin grin. The power of this cabaret hostess in her world—and she had considerable power—lay in the divining rod of understanding she bore through life. She knew exactly what reactions her conservative young host was passing through. He didn't want his orderly existence disturbed by any such SOS as she was sending out; but she was not here to consider his wishes.

"You'd jump into a lake for her if she was drownin', wouldn't you? You'd drag her out of the way if an automobile was goin' to run over her. Or would you?" she stopped to ask, as one who has an open mind.

"Of course I would." Barry drew his chair a little closer to her and Verna followed the maneuver with an approving eye, unconscious that his own carefully lowered voice was a hint to her not to take the entire household into her confidence. As if to emphasize the momentary silence, a roar of laughter came to their ears from the adjoining apartment, and a girl shrieked hysterically. One of Janet's little parties was obviously in progress.

"Get on to that," Miss Morris earnestly advised. "Won't she be given the air by the agent of this house if she keeps it up?"

Barry nodded. He had thought of this several times.

"They're not often as noisy as they are to-night," he murmured, as much for his own reassurance as for Verna's.

"What I was going to say," he now told his caller, "is that there's a difference between saving a girl from drowning or street dangers, and trying to interfere with her private life. If I began to—to—"

"To tell her where she gets off," the guest helpfully suggested.

"Yes. If I did that she'd be furious. She'd tell me it was none of my business, and she'd be perfectly right. Besides, to come down to the point, what I've heard about her gang, and of course I've got it all from her, makes me feel that they're a fairly decent lot. They're making some extra noise to-night, but they're usually pretty quiet. What I'm wondering," he added gently, "is why you yourself don't speak to her if you think it should be done. She'd listen to you."

Barry paused inquiringly.

"She would not! I've tried it," Verna admitted. "An' she told me exactly where I could go. She seemed in a hurry to have me get there, too. First she was ragin', an' then she laughed, an' I guess she ain't stopped laughin' yet. I s'pose it was funny—me givin' her advice! As to her gang bein' quiet, Jake put the whole lot of 'em out of his place the other night. An' you can take it from me," she added solemnly, "he wouldn't of done that if he could help it, for he knows I'm strong for Jan."

"I'm awfully sorry to hear that." Barry was slightly staggered. "I had no idea—"

"Well, you got an idea now. That's what I'm here for—to give you some

ideas. You say you're Jan's friend. All right. Show me. What I mean," she added hastily, "is show Jan. She's the one that needs to be shown that some one cares whether she stays on the toboggan or hops off. If she stays she's goin' to hit the bottom some of these days, an', believe me, she'll hit it damned hard.

"The way I see it is this," she went on, realizing that Barry was now giving her his whole attention. "Here's a girl that ain't got a chance unless some one else gets busy. She's got a yen for this life, an' it's goin' to grow. Her father's in South America, wherever that is. I'm hopin' he'll fall off one of his bridges some day. If I had time I'd pray for it. He's no good. His idea of father stuff is to send that girl ten times as much sugar as she ought to have. As fast as she empties her cup in the cupboard he fills it again. That brought a dozen bums around her as soon as she hit the town; an' now the good news has gone out, an' they're runnin' to her from most of our big centers. Some of 'em act quiet, like you say, but not one of them's on the up-an'-up, an' the manners an' morals of a few of those lads would give a boy like you a nervous chill."

Verna blew another smoke ring.

"An' all the time this is goin' on," she added with a sudden edge to her voice, "Jan's Boy Friend is settin' in the next flat thinkin' how ree-fined life is, an' wonderin' will he be president of the bank next year or not till the year after."

Verna seemed to have completed her oration, for she now rose and reached for her fur coat. Barry got up and silently helped her into it. His face was flushed, but his vivid blue eyes looked into hers with glints of amusement in them.

"I don't wonder Jan's strong for you, big boy," Verna brought out with a sigh. Under the influence of this discovery she added reflectively, "You got it all."

Barry grinned at her, like the small boy he still felt himself at moments. Then he sobered.

"I'll do what I can," he promised.

"But I've no idea how to start. How do you think I ought to begin? Talk to her?"

Verna shook her bobbed blond head. Putting one gold slippers foot on the brass fender before her, she stared into the fire.

"The first thing I'd do," she said at last, "is go out with her gang an' give 'em the once-over. That'll show you whether I'm right or not, an' it'll show Jan what that gang really is—if you know what I mean? With you lookin' on she'll see 'em the way you do—an' I'm bettin' that will give her some jolt."

She ended with a laugh less optimistic than her words and started for the door.

"S'long," the night-club queen remarked casually.

Barry, who had followed her to the door, took her hand and pressed it.

"You're a good sort," he said gratefully. "I'll do what I can, but you may hear a call for help before long. You see," he said. "I haven't had any experience in this sort of thing."

Miss Morris looked at him. There was a friendly expression in her keen eyes, and she gave him a smile that went well with the rhinestone-trimmed front of her evening gown. She nodded thoughtfully.

"I got a hunch," she assured him, "that you ain't as simple as you look!"

The door closed on her departure and her startled host was left to digest

this unfortunate climax of an otherwise inspiring interview.

CHAPTER IX

JANET THROWS A PARTY



IT had been remarked by members of the faculty at Cambridge that one of Cabot's few faults as a student was a tendency to procrastinate. When he tackled a job he did it thoroughly, but he frequently showed a disposition to take his time in approaching a task that suggested hard labor. Warned of the dangers of this policy, he had set himself to change it, and a nice illustration of his progress in the effort was afforded by his conduct now.

With the departure of Miss Morris every conservative, self-protective, and indolent instinct in him urged him to go comfortably to bed and take up "later on" the duty she had put upon him.

These instincts, he realized, had to be suppressed at once. It should not be hard to conquer them, for they had been weakened by the repression of years.

Barry went into his dressing room, rebrushed his shining black hair, and vainly inspected his evening clothes for creases. He then arranged the fire screen more carefully, snapped off the electric light, turned his back upon the carnal comforts of his own quarters, and strode to Jan's door.

He would drop in on her and her friends, and if, when they started their usual exodus toward the night club, she asked him to go with them, he would accept the invitation. A momentary hope that the visit to her flat would suffice for that evening was also conquered almost without a struggle.

With set jaws and determined knuckles the future financier assaulted the panels of Janet's door. He had to knock loudly to be heard above the clamor within.

Janet herself answered the summons, and her flushed face deepened in color as her eyes met the caller's. Barry realized that she was not overjoyed to see him, and the discovery made him glad he had come. She must be doing something she was ashamed of. She recovered in an instant the self-possession she had lost.

"Look who's here!" she cried gaily. "Come in; come in. Ladies and gentlemen," she added as the newcomer crossed the threshold, "let me present the friend of my innocent childhood and the stern critic of my later years, Mr. Barry Cabot."

Barry entered the familiar living room that now seemed packed to discomfort with human beings. Later he realized that only nine young men and three girls were the possessors of the numerous arms and legs that were scattered about the place, but for the moment there seemed scores of them.

The guests differed in many respects, but they had at least one characteristic in common. They all sprawled.

A languid blond young man, good-looking enough to be a moving picture star, lay at full length on the divan. Two more, less picturesque but equally indolent, sprawled on a rug before the fire with their elbows on floor cushions. A girl Jan subsequently addressed as "Maisie," sat sidewise in an easy chair with her thin silk-stockinged legs dangling over one arm of it.

A youth on the floor in front of the chair rested his head against her thigh, and in another easy chair an absorbed couple sat together, arms lovingly in-

terlocked, while both drank at close intervals from the same glass. Disregarding the presence of the newcomer, they continued a low-voiced tête-à-tête sprinkled with titters.

Mrs. Perry was nowhere to be seen. Barry realized that she did not grace Jan's "at homes," as the girl imaginatively called them.

Some of the guests nodded to the new arrival. Others ignored the general introduction and looked through him as impersonally as if he had been a window.

Only the girl called Maisie had a loitering eye. Her gaze dwelt on him, and she sent him a smile of invitation. Before he could respond to it, the blond young man on the divan rose and shook hands. Barry wished he hadn't, for the fellow had the manner of a host.

"Welcome, big stranger," the blond young man said genially. "We been expecting you. Take your weight off your feet and park right here."

He motioned the newcomer to a seat beside him on the divan, and turned to the rest with incredible animation.

"Now you folks can hand me that ten dollars, and be damned quick about it."

A howl of protest burst from the gathering, and rattled the numerous glasses on a near-by table.

"Well, I like that," one of the sheiks on the rug roared above the general din. "He breezes in a week after the whole thing is off, and you want to collect."

"The whole thing isn't off," the blond young man vociferated. "There was absolutely no time limit to the experiment. I said I'd get Cabot here by the power of concentrated thought, and here he is. I didn't say *when*—did I, Jan?"

"You didn't. I think you ought to have the ten, Jerry."

"Then you'll have to cough it up," muttered a girl who had not spoken before. "No one else in this gang has ten berries."

"That's all right."

The blond young man lay down again, absently depositing his head in Barry's lap. Barry promptly moved from under it.

"You'll be more comfortable alone," he affably observed, crossing to an empty chair near the couch. The blond young man sighed.

"An undeveloped social sense," he assured the others. "However it's quite all right," he informed Barry. "Two hours from now you'll probably be trying to put your head in my lap—and I'll let you," he added forgivingly. "When do I get the ten, Jan?"

"Later on. And I'll remind the rest," Janet raised her voice above the renewed clamor of protest, "that as you're making me give the prize, I can be the judge of whether it's been earned. I think Jerry put his experiment over in great shape, and he ought to have a vote of thanks instead of all this grousing."

She turned to Barry and explained.

"You see, Jerry's a wonder at mind control and telepathy. Last Tuesday night he made a bet that he'd will you to come in here. I had just told the gang I could never get you to come to my parties. So Jerry said he'd land you at my knees to beg my pardon for not coming sooner. By the way, you haven't done that yet, Jerry."

She was Miss Perry of Wheaton tonight, and Barry was reassured.

"Give me time," Jerry said. He had filled a glass, obviously to celebrate his triumph, and was taking deep drafts of its contents. The others

broke out again, led by the two youths on the rug. Even the absorbed couple in the armchair aroused themselves to a vague interest in the discussion.

"Jerry hasn't made Cabot kneel, and he didn't make him come," one young man on the rug called out. "He didn't bring him in alone. Every one of us helped him last Tuesday night. We all willed at once."

"Yes, and that's what gummed the machine," Jerry testified bitterly, finishing his drink. "Alone I'd have done the stunt in ten minutes. With you morons butting in it took a week, and I admit it's an imperfect job. Cabot!" His voice took on a plaintive note. "Would you mind getting down on your knees at Miss Perry's feet and asking her pardon for not coming sooner?"

"I would," Barry admitted. "But I'm willing to ask her pardon from this comfortable chair, if that will do."

"It 'll do," Jerry conceded. "The whole job's messed up anyway. I'll take the ten in ones, Jan. It will look more like a roll."

The young apostle of mental telepathy glanced around the room with an unconcealed air of triumph. His face was not pleasant to look at.

"That money ought to be divided," one of the girls suddenly announced. "We've all earned it as much as Jerry has. Besides, if you give Jerry ten dollars we won't see him again till it's gone. You know perfectly well he never shows up here if he has a cent to go anywhere else."

This remark caused a momentary constraint in the gathering, whereupon Janet, who had turned a look of keen disapproval on the speaker, created a diversion.

"I'll give you the ten dollars in ones or any other way you want it," she told

Jerry, "if you'll do some stunt that will show Barry of Wheaton that this isn't all talk. He really can put something over once in a while," she assured Barry in a lower voice.

"Oh, all right. What I've just shown you would have convinced intelligent minds." Jerry spoke sulkily. "But if you've got to have it even simpler, I'm on. Would you mind going into the outside hall, Cabot?" As Barry rose and started toward the door he stopped him. "I suppose you know how the thing's done," he drawled. "You go out in the hall and empty your mind."

The girl in the armchair uttered a shriek of laughter.

"Sounds like a waste paper basket," she yelped.

Barry decided that she was the hysterical one. Jerry turned a cold gaze upon her and gave the look time to sink in.

"Try to think of nothing," Jerry then continued, returning his attention to Barry. "I'll admit you'll have a harder job of it than most of those present. While you're out of the room I'll will you to do a certain thing when you come in again. Your part is to follow any impulse you have when you get back into this room."

"And no matter w'at it is, deary," the girl Maisie drawled, "it 'll be absolutely all right for you to do it."

Barry left the room. He felt rather foolish and very much relieved. If this was the sort of thing that worried Miss Morris, he thought he could reassure her the next time they met. He recalled taking part in similar diversions in the parlors of Wheaton when he was fifteen years old. Awaiting his call to action he heard a whirlwind of laughter, then Janet's excited voice.

"You'll do nothing of the sort, Jerry," she said—and again it was Janet of Wheaton who spoke. "And if I hear one more bright idea like that," she went on in a different tone, "there won't be any prize given to-night."

She had raised her voice above the clamor, which now died down. Barry flushed. He could form some notion of what the bright idea had been. A few minutes later Jerry opened the door.

"Come in, old man," he invited. He added, when they were inside: "Now stand still a minute till you're sure your mind has my message. Then do anything your little heart dictates."

Barry stood in the center of the room, looking around it and feeling idiotic. The crowd was quiet and attentive. He felt no impulse to do anything at all, but he tried to play up. He started toward the grand piano and wondered whether he ought to have an impulse to hear Janet sing. He had never had such an impulse, and had none now.

He walked over to a long reading table covered with books, magazines, and sheet music, and stood staring down at it. There was an open silver box on the table, half filled with cigarettes. He took one. The "gang" shouted.

Jerry rose and bowed spectacularly.

"If any one doubts my powers after that," he drawled, "he'd better not say so. I'll make him run around the block all night." He crossed the room to his hostess. "I'll trouble you for that ten, Jan, and then I've got to toddle off."

"Pig!" said Maisie. "He's afraid if he goes out wit' this bunch," she told Barry, who had now responded to her early invitation and was sitting beside

her, "he'll blow some of the kale on them. Don't worry, Jerry," she added sweetly, "you wouldn't. I see you resist the temptation every time!"

"Say, Maisie, tell us the next time you see that temptation come," urged one of the young men on the rug. "I've got to be shown that Jerry ever had it."

The entire group appeared to be embittered by the fact that Jerry was now pocketing ten dollars handed him by his hostess. Janet realized the acute discontent of her guests.

"Drown your sorrows in drink," she advised, indicating the empty glasses on every hand and a number of bottles on a sideboard.

The suggestion was a welcome one. Even Jerry lingered for a final libation before he breezed out into the open spaces.

Barry suppressed an impulse to go back to his own quarters and to bed. It was the sole impulse he had experienced, notwithstanding Jerry's will power. He had automatically picked up a cigarette because the box was in front of him and every one else was smoking. Janet caught his involuntary move to rise.

"Don't go," she ordered. "We're all going up to the Cockcrow Club, now, and I want you to stick around."

Barry groaned inwardly and smiled brightly.

"All right. Thanks."

"You'll go—sure thing?" Janet seemed unable to believe in her victory. "That's great! The Cockcrow's one of the high spots," she added eagerly, "and it has the best dance music in town."

Evidently the hostess decided the party's destination, for no protests or suggestions were offered by the guests. Those guests, to Barry's eyes, were by

this time somewhat vaguely transforming themselves into individuals.

The two youths on the rug were brothers, and were referred to as the "Hellish Twins" by their admiring circle. They had slim, rather elegant figures, which they dressed to perfection, pale, weak faces, exactly alike, which showed the effects of bad air, late hours, and overdrinking, and really charming manners when they chose to exert themselves, which was not often.

The favorite diversion of each was to make his intimates think he was the other brother, an achievement too easy to interest any one else. They quarreled fiercely and frequently, and were rarely apart. They had no visible means of support, but moved in circles on which they could always depend for meals and amusements.

Where they went when the night clubs closed was a mystery none of their intimates ever solved. They were never seen from three in the morning till lunch time, when they appeared at some friend's table in a hotel or restaurant, admirably dressed and full of confidence in their power to charm.

They knew every one in New York's night life, and had the gossip of its various strata at the tongue's end. They were human Who's Who's, opening up, as it were, at any name, and easily closed when one was weary of their chronicles.

Barry, who learned all this from Maisie, was also assured by the same high authority that Janet was mighty lucky to have caught the twins in her social net. They were, Maisie said, the cat's whiskers in the night club crowd.

Barry could not appreciate Jan's good fortune. He had a strong desire to step on the Hellish Twins every

time he came in contact with them, and only the stern discipline to which he had long subjected his impulses enabled him to overcome this one.

Maisie, who quietly annexed him while the crowd was having its final drink before leaving Jan's flat, was also one of the hostesses in Jake's club, and had made it plain that she was departing at once for that scene of her activities.

She was a stunning looking girl, with a perfect figure, a superb carriage, and the diction of a guttersnipe. She was said to be Russian born, but admitted that she didn't know "the lingo."

As a matter of record, she had been taken in charge by the Gerry Society when she was a young immigrant of four, and adopted by a Brooklyn family when she was six; and she had so misconducted herself from that tender age onward, that when she ran away at fourteen her foster parents refrained from efforts to recover her.

She was second to Miss Morris in authority at Jake's, but only Maisie was conscious of any rivalry between herself and the head hostess. Miss Morris disapproved of everything about Maisie, but treated her with invariable justice and consideration.

Maisie had ophidian tendencies and undulated and coiled. Barry disliked her even more than he did the Hellish Twins, but he exerted himself to play up in response to her overtures. He might find Maisie useful in some future emergency.

In addition to these three, Janet and himself, there were seven other guests whose names he had not caught. Two of them were sisters, dark and pretty, well-dressed like all the gang, and with what he considered the hardest faces he had ever seen on girls so young.

His first really interesting discovery in this new world he was penetrating was that the women in it all seemed harder than the men, whose faces as a rule were merely weak and self-indulgent.

The four remaining young men bore out this theory. Save for an eye weariness they all had in common, they might have been young clerks at a ribbon or glove counter in any department store. But Barry reminded himself that, of course, he hadn't yet seen any of these lads in action.

When Janet gave the signal for departure—she moved her guests as if they were pawns on a chess board—he excused himself and slipped back to his own quarters for his coat, hat, and some money. He took with him all the bank notes he found in a small wall safe in which he kept his cash reserve. He had a suspicion that the evening would be an expensive one, and he was right.

The party dropped Maisie at Jake's club on the way uptown. The remaining eleven, in wha' the twins referred to as three "rattlers," continued their journey to the Cockcrow, which they entered in a chattering group that drew every eye upon them.

So far as Barry could see, all the tables were occupied, and a number of them were already encroaching upon the dancing space in the center of the big room; but the head waiter at once got into action, ordered two extra tables brought in, and placed them together on the outer edge of the room, remote from the well-illuminated dancing square.

The gang was evidently a familiar one to him, and Barry observed that the man's respectful greeting was tinged with apprehension. Presented to Barry by the hostess, his acknowl-

edgment of the newcomer was almost effusive. Possibly he expected this stalwart youth to keep order at the newly added tables.

Barry was not wholly a novice in night clubs, but neither was he an habitu . Looking around him with interest, he decided that this one was probably better than the average.

The room was big. Its walls were gorgeously decorated in the ultra-modern style, the chief motive being something that represented a rampant crowing cock outlined against a flaming rising sun. The several hundred guests were in full evening dress, and there was a good sprinkling among them of what Barry recognized as the Social Register set.

The tables were attractive; glass, linen and china were immaculate, and the waiters—a husky lot—wore fresh liveries, clean linen, and did not perspire obtrusively. One of New York's most popular cabaret conductors led a stimulating jazz band.

Two magnums of champagne nestling in cracked ice appeared on the table before Janet's guests were seated, and Barry paid for them. The hostess made a gesture, expressing temporary acceptance and certain future settlement, then ordered a round of cocktails and Welsh rarebits for eleven. One of the Hellish Twins protested pathetically.

"I'm hungry," he pointed out. "I'm a strong man, and I need to be fed. I want a great big tenderloin steak with fried potatoes and onions."

"Give him what he wants," Janet told the waiter, and the steak was brought in due time. The others appeared satisfied with their rarebits. No one but the twin was hungry, but it at once became clear that, with the exception of the hostess and Barry, the

entire party had an active and consuming thirst.

CHAPTER X

ENTER TONY THE CAT



HE orgy that followed was the sort of thing young Cabot had often read about but had never seen equaled or approached even at a college dinner after a football victory.

Cocktails entered the guests as nickels enter a slot machine, and at first with little more effect. An hour later, however, the drinkers became noisy and the twins were irritable.

Barry danced the first dance with Janet, and was given the doubtful tribute of an amazed acceptance of his skill.

"You dance beautifully, big boy," she warmly assured him. "It's a relief, for I expected you'd spend the evening on my feet instead of on your own. I thought you'd be above this dancing stunt. My experience is that the whiter the dancer's soul the surer he is to send his partner sprawling."

"You act as if you couldn't distinguish me from old Jessup," Barry grumbled during a later dance, when she complimented him on his tango. "I haven't been in Wheaton all my life."

"No, and I'm beginning to see you've made some use of the intervals."

So far, at least, she was principally Janet of Wheaton, and Barry needed such comfort as this gave him, for their return to the table, after this dance and two encores, revealed the twins quarreling hotly, and one of the sisters, whose name he now learned was Kershaw, exhibiting a passionate determination to mount the table and

do an acrobatic stunt among the crockery.

All the champagne had followed the innumerable cocktails, and several of the guests, who had already indulged freely in Janet's apartment, were in a state of hysterical intoxication.

Not one, save Barry and the head waiter, seemed disturbed by these conditions. That servitor now approached the table with smiling lips and cold eyes.

"Everything is satisfactory, *mademoiselle*?" he politely asked Janet, and added in an undertone as he bent over the table ostensibly to move the centerpiece: "It is not well to attract too much attention this evening. There are many outsiders here, and card games are going on off the corridor so near your table. If *mademoiselle* can restrain a little the spirits of her guests—"

Janet nodded, but she also flushed. Barry was glad to see that flush. Judging by what he had heard from Miss Morris and observed himself, she must be accustomed to such tacit criticism of her group, but she was not altogether hardened to it. She spoke to the gang with decision.

"Fan, sit down and shut up. Charlie, if you don't stop fussing I'll break up the party. And, believe me, if I do that," she added warningly, "there's no place we'll go from here."

The warning temporarily sobered Miss Kershaw, especially as her sister lent timely aid to it by dipping the corner of her napkin in cold water and briskly applying it to Fan's eyes and temples.

"What in hallelujah d'you think you're doin'?" the outraged recipient of this attention hotly inquired. "You've taken my eyelashes off!"

She extracted a vanity case from her

hand bag, and the repairing of the damage held her attention for five minutes. Charlie, the more quarrelsome of the twins, subdued his criticism of his brother to low mutterings.

"All the champagne's gone, Jan," one of the four nondescript young men pointed out. "Hadn't you better order another round?"

"All right, Dave; all right. But why the devil don't you lads get up and shake an ankle with the girls once in a while? What do you think you're here for? The exercise may keep you sober a few minutes longer, too," the candid hostess added bitterly.

She beckoned to the head waiter and ordered two more magnums. He glanced at the temporarily subdued guests and went away to fill the order.

Barry paid for the champagne when it appeared. He asked the more sober of the Kershaw sisters for the next dance. In further response to the strong hint of the hostess, one of the twins and the young man called Dave led Jan and the second Kershaw girl out on the floor.

The restoration of her eyelashes seemed to have a generally bracing effect on the latter young person. Barry, following her progress with anxious eyes, saw that she was dancing easily, and even appeared able to talk to her partner, though she giggled hysterically. Her sister favored him with an illuminating explanation of Fan's peculiarities.

"Fan's always like that at first," she grumbled. "Falls over under three or four cocktails and a few glasses of fizz. When she gets her second wind she can drink a barrel of hootch and not show it. By the time we go home she'll be the only steady one in the gang, and she'll turn all our toes in the right direction."

Barry smiled his reservations. His one drink that evening was a whisky and soda, half of which he had left in his glass. He was not surprised to find it gone when he got back to the table. The second supply of champagne also was almost gone and another round of cocktails had been ordered by Charlie. The check smiled up at Barry from its place beside his plate.

The room was very hot and increasingly crowded. A dozen additional couples had come in since Jan's party arrived, and in some way room had been found for them all. But it had been taken from the dancing space, where the congestion was already painful.

During the next number Barry, whose normal dancing was among the best on the floor, bumped into an irate leader of our best circles, trod on the toes of a moving picture actress who smiled at him forgivingly, and was finally jammed against a pillar by an energetic young man whose muttered apology gave way to a stare of surprise when he recognized his victim. Simultaneously Barry recognized the energetic young man.

"Tut, tut!" said Ward Howson, shaking his head. "Look who's here!" After an awe-struck glance at Barry's dancing partner, he added in the young man's ear: "Naughty, naughty!"

Barry laughed, but he was annoyed. Howson's partner, he realized, was a girl of his own set. He was probably at the Cockcrow with a more or less conventional party of friends. He may not yet have seen Barry's table and its group, but he could be counted on to do so after this meeting, and to form his own impressions of his assistant teller's companions. Also to mention the matter to "Uncle Alfred" in the

stern routine of his duty.

Miss Jennie Kershaw, who was not unobservant, became conscious of the cloud on her companion's brow.

"Was that your Sunday school teacher, Barry?" she asked in a far-carrying voice. She had caught only her partner's first name in Janet's off-hand general introduction.

"Something like it," Barry admitted.

"I'll tell your fortune," Miss Kershaw volunteered. "You ain't goin' to get no present from his Christmas tree after this. Say, let's go back to the table and have s'more drinks."

They went. It was almost one o'clock, and the general atmosphere of the place was loosening up. The solo dances were in progress. Colored searchlights swept the big room at intervals, picking out tables here and there.

Roars of laughter came from a long table near theirs, where half a dozen western buyers were being entertained by several New York merchants, and two of the club's "hostesses." At another table a stout, fresh-faced woman, whose white "transformation" had slipped grotesquely over one eye, was gazing deep into the eyes of a pallid *gigolo* in his twenties who sat opposite her, and talking to him in whispers.

"Veedy's struck it rich," Miss Kershaw observed, following his glance and letting her own eyes linger on the pallid *gigolo*.

"Who's Veedy?"

"He's one of the boys that used to dance here. The club paid him to dance with the dames that hadn't partners. If he made a hit with the dames they paid him, too, so he got his both ways. Now he's got a better job. He's got that old girl, and he's got her go-

ing. She pays him a salary and all his expenses to drag her around nights."

Barry was not especially interested in "Veedy," but he was glad to have his partner point out several more distinguished habitués of the club—a world-famous operatic tenor, a society woman who had recently figured in a sensational divorce case and who was wearing a small fortune in diamonds.

"Ain't she damn silly to bring that show case into a place like this?" his companion interpolated.

"A lot of queer birds comes here," Jennie added. "All the little rooms off this hall near our table are private rooms for suppers and card games. You'd think they'd want a quiet place, but some of the biggest games in New York are played in there by men like Dan Skelly and Brian Strong and the Bosco brothers and their gang. They think it's safer than hotel rooms, an' I guess it is. The Cockcrow's never been pulled yet."

She checked these revelations to point out a great violinist solemnly dancing with a Follies girl, and to assure Barry that a very fat man with a bald head and a purpling face, who had three of the club's hostesses at his table, was the "best sugar baby" in New York.

"He ain't got a pocket without a hole in it," she testified admiringly. "He's the lad that put the pay in champagne. When he asks a lady to supper he buys wine by the case."

In short, Jennie, in the words of her circle, "was there with the cackle." Barry decided that she had fully repaid him for the inconvenience he had suffered on the congested dancing floor, though her suggestion that she could dance with him forever left him cold.

They had danced the encores, and the interval of their absence had evidently been filled by the ordering of more drinks by their companions. Fanny Kershaw was reviving under the added stimulants, as her sister had predicted.

Two additional hours crawled into the past. Charlie and three of the non-descript young men had reached a stage of loose-lipped and pronounced intoxication.

Seated next to Janet, and directly facing the corridor back of their table, Barry subconsciously realized that one special room off the corridor held an unusually active party. Waiters were frequently entering and leaving it with trays holding bottles and pails of ice, and the guests seemed as active as the waiters.

Among those who came and went at intervals was the noiseless and swift-moving youth Howson had identified as Strong's henchman, Dink the Shadow. Barry observed also a handsome man in his forties, of the Broadway rounder type, and a big six-foot Italian who moved with a catlike grace the observer found himself watching on the two occasions when the man appeared in the corridor. All three men were in evening dress, and had the air of habitués of the place.

The gang was getting noisier, and Barry looked inquiringly at Janet.

"We'd better get them out, hadn't we?" he asked in a low voice.

"It would only start a row. They won't go."

Janet's speech was a trifle slow, and her eyes looked heavy. He realized with a shock that even she had been drinking too much, though she had been very temperate as compared with her friends. However, her brain was still clear, and the Kershaw sisters

also were in possession of such faculties as they had. It was the young men in the group who were ready to make trouble, and the more quarrelsome of the twins demonstrated his willingness to start it at once.

"A pois'nous party," he announced thickly. "Tha's what I calls this kind of a bunch—pois'nous. An' I'll tell the worl'," he hiccuped, "my brother Cary's the mos' pois'nous party in it. Know what Cary's like? He's like somethin' tha' comes out from under stonsh when you turn 'em over. Crawl-in'! Tha's what he's like. Lis'en, I'll tell you what Cary's like. He's—"

The other boys, besotted though they were, tried vaguely to quiet him. Charlie in liquor had no verbal limitations when he got on the subject of his brother. They laid unsteady hands over his mouth, and he fought them off.

"How you can stand this sort of thing, Janet," Barry said quietly, "is beyond me. In God's name, what do you get out of it?"

Janet flushed. Again he was glad she had not lost the power to do this.

"I get some thrills out of it," she murmured. "That's what we're all after nowadays, isn't it? Thrills!"

She spoke carefully, evidently not quite sure of her diction, and as he listened Barry's heart contracted with an actual physical pang. It was the strongest emotion Janet Perry had ever given him, save on the night of Marcia Cabot's funeral. Indeed, it was the strongest emotion he had experienced in years, with the exception of his first delight in meeting Bleecker again. He bent and tried to hold her eyes.

"Janet," he begged, "give it up. Look around you. Can't you see there's nothing in all this for a nice girl?"

He was so much in earnest that his

voice was not steady, and for an instant he thought he had impressed her. She met his eyes for a second, and then her own dropped.

"It's good of you to bother with me, old boy," she said. "I know you came along to-night to put the brakes on, and not because you wanted to. But you don't understand."

She was still speaking with careful deliberation.

"You think I've had a little too much," she went on with her new candor. "Well, perhaps I had. But I can ask you a question that will put you up against it, Barry. If I drop this crowd, what will I get instead?"

As he hesitated she laughed, but the laugh was not the laugh of Janet of Wheaton. Nor was the look in the eyes with which she held his the look of Janet of Wheaton. Again he felt that strange pang.

"See?" she pointed out, almost triumphantly. "You can't answer it. You know mighty well that New York has cold-shouldered me because I haven't any—any an-te-cedents." She produced the word with an air. "I haven't any background. For me, big boy, it's this kind of life or it's no life at all. And I'm telling you right now, I've no intention of living like a nun. Not that I'm going the limit, Barry," she added quickly. "Of course you understand that?"

Barry nodded.

"Of course I do. But you're all wrong about the rest of it," he said quietly. "You can't break into social New York in a few weeks or months. But if you had a little patience—"

She made a gesture of hopelessness. Before he could speak again the twins demanded his attention. Charlie, momentarily silenced by his friends, had resumed his verbal attack on his

brother, and had finally stirred that youth to retaliation.

Enraged, Cary struck at Charlie's face across the table. The next instant both young men were on their feet exchanging blows. The centerpiece wobbled and crashed. Three of the nondescript young men tried to pull the twins apart.

The head waiter hastened toward them, his expression ominous.

"He won't do anything," Janet assured Barry.

She was regarding the scene indifferently, as if it were a familiar one. Barry did not share her optimism about the head waiter's attitude. He remembered that only a few nights ago this group had been thrown out of Jake's.

However, his attention was divided. There were loud voices coming from one of the rooms off the corridor near Jan's table. What the head waiter might have done to Jan's gang, Barry never learned. For the moment the band was not playing, and before the man reached the table a sound, intensely significant to such a crowd, was heard above the chatter in the room.

In criminal cases witnesses frequently testify that they have been unable to distinguish a pistol shot from the noise of an exploding tire, but those really familiar with both sounds have no such difficulty. Many of the Cockcrow's guests could recognize a pistol shot when they heard it, and they heard it now.

The bark of an automatic came from the small room from which the raised voices had been heard. It was immediately followed by a second shot.

The head waiter stopped in his stride toward Janet, stared an instant, and then swung away in the direction of the shots.

Simultaneously the door of the corridor room opened and a man staggered out.

For perhaps ten seconds he posed motionless, giving Janet and Barry, who sat directly facing him, a tableau they never forgot. He was bent far forward, with both hands pressed tightly to his abdomen. The fingers of those protecting hands were stained with blood, and the man's clean shaven, livid face was distorted with agony.

He seemed about to collapse, but the next instant he had turned his back and was lurching unsteadily toward the rear end of the hall.

Barry had a glimpse of a second figure just behind the injured man—a

figure huge, forward hunched and swift moving, which had followed him through the still open door. It seemed trying to pass the other, but the corridor was too narrow. Barry saw its face.

He heard Janet's stifled groan of horror and cast a quick look at her. She could not have seen the second man, but obviously she had seen the wounded one, for she had shudderingly covered her face with both hands.

Of all those at the table, he and she alone faced directly that narrow passage. He doubted if the others had seen either figure.

As these reflections rushed through his mind the lights went out. The big room was in complete darkness.

THE COCKCROW MYSTERY CHANGED THE LIVES OF BARRY AND JANET
AND J. C. BLEECKER. WATCH FOR AMAZING NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN OCTOBER MUNSEY



THE PERFECT FACE

THE Graces, on a summer day,
Grew serious for a moment—yea,
They thought in rivalry to trace
The outline of a perfect face.

Each used a rosebud for a brush,
And while it glowed with sunset's blush,
Each painted on the evening sky,
And each a star used for the eye.

They finished. Each a curtaining cloud
Drew back, and each exclaimed aloud:
"Behold, we three have drawn the same
From the same model!" Ah! her name?

I know. I saw the pictures grow,
I saw them falter, fade, and go.
I know the model—oft she lures
My heart. The face, my sweet, was yours.

Walter H. Hanway



SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

Watching the Clock

HOW far back the measurement of time goes is lost in the unrecorded events of prehistoric days. It is altogether probable that early man reckoned the passage of time by the length of the shadows cast on the ground and later perhaps an instrument similar to the hour glass served to measure the divisions of the day.

Certain it is that clocks as we know them were not invented until the ninth century, and the credit for the idea is given to a man of Verona named Pacificus.

Like all things mortal, the clock had faults as well as virtues. Before the hours were automatically measured for him man worked until he was tired and then "called it a day." With the coming of the clock he began measuring his efforts by time and acquired the habit of "watching the clock."

There is one certain thing—no creature not endowed with more than two eyes can watch his job and the clock at the same time.

When a man is looking at a clock, his sole interest is the answer to the question, "What time is it?"

The most efficient office in Washington during the World War was one particular division of the Navy Department. In that big room there was neither a calendar nor a clock.

by Fred A. Walker

The head of that bureau said to the writer: "I do not want any one here who cares what day it is or what time it is. The measure of a day here is the finishing of the work in hand; then we can all go home."



No truly earnest worker was ever able to quite finish his day's task. There always remains some portion upon which he would like to spend a little more effort, a little longer time.

The reason the not-in-earnest worker watches the clock is because his heart is not in his labors and his pride is not in their results.

But we are all wasteful of time. We live as if we were facing an eternity instead of the few brief moments that measure the space between birth and death.

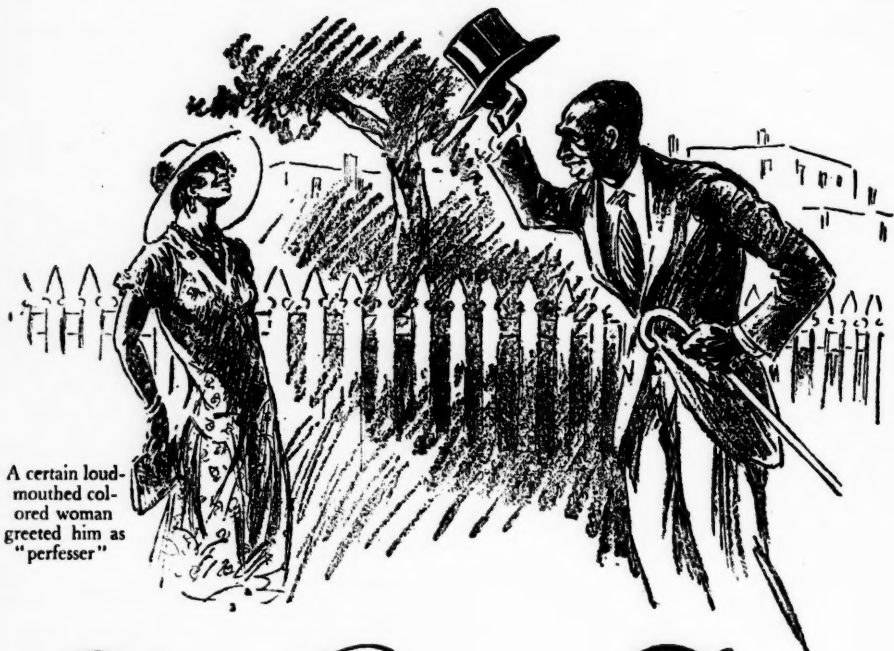
At only one time does the average human being measure time with effort, and that is when he is goaded by fear.

Don't be a clock watcher. Work while you work with so much energy, so much interest, so much intensity that time doesn't matter.

Play when you play with so much abandon, so much enjoyment, so much enthusiasm that the day passes without your measurement.

The man who measures time in cycles or circles is wrong. Time must be computed in a straight line along which there is no backward motion.

You can never have yesterday again. If you wasted it, try to make to-day do double duty. But you can't do that if you watch the clock.



A certain loud-mouthed colored woman greeted him as "perfesser"

The Great Farm School

A remarkable scheme for the uplifting of the colored race in Tickfall and the glorification of Step Scott

By E. K. Means



DAT nigger done been in town about a month, an' I ain't never paid him no pertickler mind befo'," Vinegar Atts remarked, as the Big Four sat under a chinaberry tree in the rear of the popular negro hang-out called the Henscratch.

"I done seen him hangin' aroun', but it jes' made me kind of curious," Skeeter replied. "Dar's got to be a heap of new coons in town, an' I cain't keep up wid 'em. Dis town ain't whut it use to be. I kin remember when I knowed eve'y nigger in Tickfall."

"Dis feller has opened him a office,

an' calls hisself de promoter of de Tick-fall Farm School. Whut in de name of mud is dat?" Pap Curtain inquired.

"Gawd knows," Figger Bush wailed. "I ain't got no use fer a school an' no time fer a farm."

"I figger we ought to mix in an' find out about dis," Pap suggested.

"Dat shows how times is changed," Skeeter sighed. "Time wus when all de new coons come right straight to us an' axed our advices. Now we got to hunt 'em up an' ax 'em whut dey's aimin' to do."

"Well, le's git to gwine," Vinegar urged. "We might git some fun out of it. Whut is a farm school? How do a feller teach a farm?"

"It's de yuther way 'roun'," Skeeter snickered. "A farm learns you."

"All it ever learnt me wus to keep away from it," Figger Bush said. "Lawd, I done sweat enough hoein' cotton to irrigate all de farms in dis country!"

The four men walked down the street and entered a little room which had once been used as a barber's shop for colored patrons. Now it contained a desk and a few chairs, and looked like a place where, if any kind of business was transacted, it was only business of minor importance.

A tall negro who was sitting at the desk, wearing a big wool hat, rose at their entrance and swept off his head covering with a full-armed gesture which impressed his callers at once.

"I reckon you keep on yo' hat so dat eve'ybody whut calls to see you kin perceive you make dat noble bow," Vinegar laughed. "How long is you practiced dat to git so puffed?"

"All my manners is nachel," the man replied with an easy smile. "I wus bawnd a cullud gent, an' I can't git away from my raisin'. My maw raised

me wid a hick'ry limb, an' raised me frequent. My name is Step Scott, an' I's at yo' service."

"Us don't want nothin'," Pap Curtain told him. "We jes' drapped in to meet yo' 'quaintance."

They all sat down, and the Big Four made a closer inspection of the new man. They promptly decided that he was not going to be one of the important or valuable citizens of the town. The most impressive things about him were his big hat, his sweeping bow, and his grand and lofty manner. His necktie was frayed to a worn and ragged string. His shoes consisted chiefly of the uppers, and made it easy for him to keep his feet on the ground; and everything between the necktie and the shoes made it appear that the "farm school"—whatever that was—had not been a prosperous institution.

Nevertheless, there was nothing in Step Scott's manner to indicate that he thought he was down and out. His easy, confident manner seemed to announce that while he might have lost a good many bets, he now regarded himself as a sure winner.

"We hopes you'll find dat you like our town an' will make yo' home wid us," Vinegar remarked politely.

"I like it fine," Step said, looking at Vinegar with eager, earnest face and glowing eyes which indicated that he was alive all the time and all over.

The newcomer had the glittering eyes that mark the fanatic or the enthusiast. Vinegar decided that he was a crank of some sort, and wondered what kind of graft he was working.

At that moment the doorway was darkened by the arrival of some other callers. The Big Four turned to see who the visitors were, and beheld ten of the most stupid and ignorant colored

men ever presented to the gaze of their intelligence. Only one of the ten was even remotely known to them. He came from the far side of the Little Moccasin Swamp, and had about the intelligence of a land terrapin raised in that same almost inaccessible region.

"Excuse me, gents," Step Scott said promptly. "I hab a bizness pregame-ment wid dese here callers. I hope you fellers will come to see me agin."

He faced the new arrivals and swept off his big wool hat with the same noble gesture. Then the Big Four found themselves out on the street, having been ejected from the place so adroitly that they were confused, and wondered how it had happened.

"Huh!" Vinegar grunted disgustedly. "Us got fanned out of dar wid his hat jes' as easy as a man would slap away a fly!"

"Dat's right!" Skeeter agreed. "I wonder how come, an' why!"

II

ABOUT an hour later Step Scott returned the call of the Big Four. Coming into the Henscratch with the air of a well known and welcome visitor, he sat down and began to talk.

"I beg parding fer chasin' you fellers out so quick," he said. "I wanted to tell you what I was doin', but my callers didn't hab any place to wait in dat little orfice, an' I couldn't talk my bizness befo' dem so dey wouldn't misunderstand'."

"Dat's all right," Skeeter said cordially. "When I go fishin' fer suckers, I don't talk loud, neither. How is yo' bizness comin' on?"

"I'm doin' fine," Step said eagerly. "In fack, I've jes' found out whut I wanted to all my life—leastwise, I feels dat way. Lawd, I shore done had a hard time findin' out!"

"I guess you done tried a good many yuther things fust," Vinegar said, to encourage him to continue.

"Yep! I tried my luck wuckin' fer a livin' fer a little while, but I found it mighty hard an' hot, an' it made me tired an' wore me out. Den I played a banjo an' sung fer a patent med'cine man, ontill he done got in trouble an' got put in jail. De white folks aimed to put me in jail, too, but it wus nighttime, an' my color jes' nachelly matched wid de color of de night, so I camel-flagged myself away from dat place. Den I got a job in a street carnival, lettin' men throw baseballs at my head. One of dem balls hit me an' pounded some sense in my noggin, an' now I don't do no wuck but head wuck."

"Dat's right," Vinegar said, further to encourage the recital. "I reckon you's a heavy thinker."

"I'm too modest to say dat," Step grinned. "I wus raised meek an' humble, an' I mustn't fergit my raisin'; but I will say dat I don't wuck excep' wid my thinker."

"Whut is yo' bizness?" Skeeter asked, impatient to get to the point.

"I am grand high promoter of a farm school," Step answered, with an oratorical flourish to his tones which showed that he had so proclaimed himself with lyrical eloquence upon many occasions. "Of co'se, de wuck of gittin' started is powerful slow, an' de results is jes' beginnin' to show up. I made my fust start-off dis mawnin'."

"Did dem ten niggers at de door represent de knock of oppertunity?" Skeeter inquired.

"Dey did."

"Huh!" Skeeter commented. "Jes' de sight of dem igernunt coons mighty nigh knocked me down!"

"Igernunce craves to go to school, an' I'm de promoter of a farm school,"

said Step, with a laugh. "Any kind of knock is better dan no knock. I had my hand on de do'knob when oppertunity gib de fust tap. It didn't hab to skin its knuckles poundin' fer me!"

The four men sat and looked at Step Scott for a long time. Somehow he did not quite tell them what his business was. His manner indicated that he thought he was being perfectly frank and open, and was telling all he knew in words that they could easily understand. Finally Vinegar said:

"Yo' talk sounds mighty like poetry, Step. It don't mean much of nothin', but it sounds good, like we was listenin' to religious singin'. Howsumever, we don't know right now whut you is or whut you do fer a livin', if you does anything. Now I ax you dis—jes' whut sort of enterprise does you do de heavy thinkin' fer? Whut is de game?"

"I promotes a farm school," Step replied candidly. "I ain't invented no new methods. I jes' adapts old idears to new conditions. I follers along lines whar eve'ybody else has done succeeded, an' so has proved it kin be done; an' den I develop to de largest possibility of expansion."

"An' you done picked Tickfall fer de properest place fer all dat?" Figger Bush asked, after a pause which showed that nobody understood any more after the explanation than he did before.

"Shore! I done bought a big piece of land," Step informed him. "I'm hangin' on to a great scheme dat will change dis whole country an' revolutionaryize de cullud race. All I needs is a chance."

"A chance fer whut?" Pap Curtain snarled. "Is you gwine to start a farm or a school?"

"Bofe!"

"Is you gwine to wuck 'em together,

like a team of mules, or hitch 'em tandem, or drive 'em one at a time?" Pap asked.

"I'll kind of diversify," Step replied solemnly. "Diversification am de salvation of de sunny Southland."

"I offers to place a bet right now dat de sheriff chases you out of town," Vinegar said disgustedly. "You's slicker dan a eel an' twice as hard to ketch an' hold on to!"

"Yes, suh," Skeeter agreed, laughing. "You's gwine to mingle yo' color wid de gloom of de night an' be mighty glad it's nighttime. Nobody ain't coverin' Vinegar's bet on you."

"Thank 'e fer yo' kind words an' good wishes," Step grinned. "When I git started real good, come out an' see how I does bizness. After to-day, ef anybody axes you whar I am, tell him dat he kin find my farm school out on de banks of de Alligator Bayou."

III

THE next morning the Big Four stood in front of the Henscratch and watched Step Scott march at the head of a column consisting of the same ten men who had called at his office the day before. His followers moved in single file, for all of them had come out of the deep woods and were unaccustomed to walking abreast upon a pavement. All their days they had traveled along a dim path through the forest.

That afternoon the Henscratch was disturbed by the visit of five more colored men of about the mental caliber of the crowd that had marched away that morning. They came in and stood like dumb cattle against the wall of the building, all of them with staring eyes, apparently uncertain where they were or where they wanted to be.

Skeeter rose and walked over to them with the old-time barroom query:

"Whut's yourn?"

"Same to you," one of them answered timidly.

"Skeeter Butts is my name. I had it painted on de front of dis place once, but I hired a nigger to whitewarsh de Scratch an' he warshed my name out. Eve'ybody, white an' black, calls me Skeeter Butts."

"You don't know us," one of the men said. "It ain't no matter about our name. We hab come to go to school."

"Dis ain't no school—it's de Henscratch," replied Skeeter, "but gwine to school is a good idear. I went to school once. I even tuck a prize at school. I might hab got away wid it, but de teacher saw me take it an' made me give it back."

"Eh?" one of the men said dully.

Skeeter felt as every man feels when he tries hard and fails to get a laugh.

"Whut kin I do fer you fellers?" he asked.

"We's lookin' fer a farm school, an' we done walked powerful far," one of the young men answered wearily. "Does you know whar de school is located at?"

"Shore!" Skeeter said. "Why didn't you say dat at de fust? De new farm school is out on de Alligator Bayou. I got de info'mation dis mawnin' from de promoter."

The Big Four proceeded to give the strangers minute directions about how to get to the bayou. When they finished, a man who had been born on that bayou, who had lived there for forty years, and who had not been away from the place more than twice in his life, could not have followed the directions and found the bayou again. These backwoods negroes, however, did not know what to say. They felt that they had asked as many questions

as any one's good nature could endure, so they thanked the Big Four and walked out.

When they got out, they held a consultation, and decided that the safest thing for them would be to wait until somebody was going out that way and they could follow. Then they all walked back to the rear of the Henscratch, lay down upon the ground under the chinaberry trees, adjusted their weary limbs comfortably, sighed in a contented, happy way, smiled a foolish smile at the sun, and closed their eyes. One minute later, all of them slept.

Vinegar Atts rose from the table, and was the first to see them through the open door in the rear.

"Well, look at dat!" he whooped. "Whut do de good Lawd think of dat? Dem niggers mus' think dis is a free hotel, or de Shoofly Church on Sunday mawnin' when I's preachin'!"

"Dey look like dey wus all in, shore enough," Pap Curtain grinned. "I reckon dey mus' hab walked a mighty fur piece to git here."

"Whut is dese here fellers?" Skeeter snickered. "Is dey de pupils of de farm school, or de teachers?"

"Dem is de faculty," Vinegar replied with conviction.

"Well, dey don't he'p de looks of my bizness none, but I think I'll let 'em sleep an' rest deir minds," Skeeter said, surveying the five sleepers with disgust. "Ef dey's gwine out to de Alligator Bayou whar dar ain't nothin' but rattlesnakes, alligators, bullfrogs, crawfish, an' swamp grass, an' are gwine to undertake to teach a farm how to school, or a school how to farm, whar dar ain't neither a farm nor a school—oh, slush!"

Then, when they turned around again to look at the sleeping men, they

found Step Scott standing there, gazing hard at his clients, his eyes shining and his eager face showing that his brain was working at high pressure. When he saw the Big Four looking at him from the door, he swept off his hat with another majestic gesture.

"Dar is some mo' oppertunity!" he exclaimed, pointing to the recumbent forms. "I wus afraid it would lose de way, so I come to town to lead it to my do'."

"You cain't lead 'em nowhar now," Pap Curtain laughed. "Deir minds done gone wandering off, and dey's asleep."

"Hi!" Step Scott bawled at them. "Gee! Haw! Git up!"

Not one of the sleepers was disturbed by these commands, so Step walked over and administered a hard kick to each. This aroused them all, and, when they rubbed the drowsiness out of their eyes and saw Step, they showed the first gleam of intelligence since they arrived.

"Come on, boys!" Step urged. "I been watchin' fer you. You's already late to school. Fall in line an' foller atter me!"

The men arose and trailed along after him like dumb brutes.

The Big Four stood and stared at them in complete mystification.

"Lawd!" Vinegar sighed. "Did anybody ever see de beat?"

IV

THEY did not see anything of Step Scott for several months after this. If they thought of him at all, it was only when a new group of idiotic-looking young colored men stopped at the Henscratch hang-out to inquire the way to the farm school.

The Big Four decided that they had not seen Step because he had to be a

very busy man to handle that bunch of nitwits, that human junk heap of incompetents. He seemed to have drawn to himself a crowd of people who had never been anywhere before, since they had been born in the remotest and most inaccessible parts of the backwoods.

One day they saw Step on the street, at a distance, and did not recognize him. He wore a new silk hat and a pair of patent leather shoes, and he carried a cane. They heard a certain loud-mouthed colored woman greet him and call him "perfesser."

After that rumor came to them of striking occurrences out on the Alligator Bayou, and the Big Four could endure the pangs of curiosity no longer. They marched out there in a body.

On the banks of the bayou they saw four substantial log houses erected in the form of a square, with a large log building in the center. The architecture was of the rudest sort, but the whole thing indicated that a great deal of work had been done by somebody. Fifteen acres had been cleared of the jungle undergrowth, and the land was planted like a flower garden, all staked off to distinguish the different crops. Ditches had been dug, the soil was drained, the arrangements were healthful and clean, and it looked like a prosperous and happy community.

They walked into the main building in the center of the clearing, and there they found Step Scott sitting behind a desk, smoking a pipe, and wearing a cheerful countenance and a high silk hat. He rose, swept off his shining head adornment, and made his characteristic bow.

"Come in, niggers!" Step grinned. "I'm sure glad you come up here to see whut's been done. I guess you heard tell about some things."

"Yes, suh, an' each story wus a little better dan de las', so we couldn't stay away no longer," said Vinegar.

"My bizness is come out pretty good," Step told the visitors in a tone of great satisfaction. "All I'm got to do is to set here an' look out of de do' an' watch a lot of young niggers wuck fer me."

"Whut is dis place?" Skeeter demanded to know for about the twentieth time.

"It's a farm school," Step told him, grinning.

"How does you pussuade all dese nigger boys to wuck all dis land?" Pap asked.

"Dat's part of de school," Step told him.

"Do dey study book, too?" Skeeter inquired.

"Suttinly!" Step told him. "Dat's part of de farm."

Step leaned back in his chair and enjoyed their perplexity for a few minutes. Then he said:

"Whut is it a nigger wants mo' dan anything else in de worl' to-day? He wants a education; and, to git it, he has to go to school. Whut is it a nigger in de South to-day knows better dan anything else in de world? He knows de farm."

"Dat's right," agreed Vinegar.

"Now, all I done is to put bofe dem things together. It has been done befo'. I didn't invent no new things. I jes' adapted old idears, moved along lines of proved success, an' developed. I picked out about thirty igernunt swamp niggers, an' told dem blacks dat I wus startin' a school fer our race an' color, an' I promised to take 'em an' teach 'em fer nothin' ef dey would come. Dat suited 'em fine. Eve'y young cullud man swelled up an' walked aroun' an' announced dat he

wus gwine off to kawldge. He spent about two months axin' his friends good-by, an' den he tuck his foot in his hand an' come down here to me."

"Does you learn 'em?" Pap asked.

"Shore!" Step said. "I learn 'em how to build houses an' barns. I learn 'em how to dig ditches an' drain land. I learn 'em how to plant garden truck. Dey wuck all day, and den at night I learn 'em how to read an' write. By de end of de school year, eve'y nigger will make enough money to buy him a new suit of clothes; an' I'll send him back home lookin' like a jelly bean, an' gib him a diplomer whut states dat he has been to my school fer one year an' has done acceptable wuck."

"Is all yo' scholars happy?" Vinegar asked.

"Go ax 'em," Step suggested. "All of 'em says dat I'm de feller whut has showed 'em de way out. Most of 'em ain't never gwine back to de place whar dey come from. You kin look around you an' see fer yo'self whut dey are doin' fer me; an' when dey git through a lot of 'em will settle down in de woods close to dis school an' start to doin' de same things fer demselves. Marse Tom Gaitskill gimme one hunderd acres to start on, and he says he'll make a present of fawty acres to any of my gradwates whut wants to start up fer hisself alongside of me."

"Dis looks like a shore thing, perfesser," Vinegar said. "I believe I'll start a preachin' school an' send a lot of young niggers out to preach fer me an' pass de hat an' fotch me in de money!"

"Dar's a fortune in it," continued Step, smiling with pride. "It wus a pretty big bluff fer me to try to put over, but I ain't axin' fer no yuther chance in life. I done got my start!"



A saving sense of grace

Sugar

By Henry W. Clune

How the girl with the million-dollar figure got her name into big letters on the bills



UGAR SHANNON opened the creaky stage door of the Star Theater a few inches and peered out. A gusty rain swept across the alley and spattered her face coldly and sharply. Let-

ting the door slam to, she pulled the collar of her yellow slicker more securely about her throat.

"Coming, Al?" Sugar's voice echoed irritably in the darkened reaches of the back stage.

"As fast as a pair of awful bum casters will roll me," came an answering voice, and a moment later the abundantly curved figure of Althea Fawcett, prima donna with "Hot Babies," reached the doorway.

At the juncture where the alley met the street the two girls stood undecid-

ed, while the rain pelted them miserably.

"What you going to do?" demanded Sugar.

"I'm not going to stand here and drown like a rat, if that's what you mean," Althea declared.

"Going to the hotel?"

"I hate to cut that swell *table d'hôte* of breaded veal cutlets left over from the day before yesterday, but we'll be soused before we make it. Let's beat it for the side-arm beanery down the next block, and call it the Ritz!"

They turned a corner and scudded, with the wind at their backs, to the door of a brilliantly lighted lunch room, at this hour sparsely populated with early diners. As they crossed the room to the counter, two or three men seated along the wall raised their eyes

with interest. A young man with a cap over one ear and a cigarette dangling from the corner of his mouth, laid his heavy coffee cup on the broad arm of his chair and remarked knowingly to his companion:

"That thin one's Sugar Shannon. Boy, maybe she can't shake!"

Conscious, yet trying to appear unconscious of the notice they had attracted, Sugar and Althea gave their orders to the counter man and carried their laden trays to a far corner. They had not had the protection of umbrella or rubbers, and even in the short walk from the theater to the restaurant their hats had been drenched and their low shoes soaked through.

Sugar rested her tray on the spatulated arm of her chair and removed her dripping slicker.

"Gawd, what a life!" she observed. "Here to-day and gone to-morrow."

Althea, her mouth already filled with hot beef stew, made a ludicrous attempt to smile.

"This is just one of them wet Mondays. Maybe the sun'll be out to-morrow, and you'll get some good notices."

"Notices!" Sugar's contempt was blistering. "What do notices they give burlesque performers amount to?"

"Oh, I don't know. That critic over in Buffalo last week wasn't bad. Remember, he said you had the labor movement beat a mile?"

"I suppose that's a fine compliment, eh? That's art—shaking and grinding for the bums that sit in the front row with their eyes popping out, hoping your breastplates 'll slip off and there won't be anything they've missed for their fifty cents!"

Althea looked up surprised. She was used to Sugar's fits of temperament, but the present one was more

bitter and of greater duration than usual.

This was the two girls' second season with "Hot Babies." Sugar was virtually the star, although in the billing her name appeared in small type below that of Charlie De Earl, the comedian, and she received twenty-five dollars a week less than he was paid. She had been discovered in a stock burlesque in Cleveland by Paul Ross, who had given her a two-year contract with "Hot Babies," with an increase the second year to seventy-five dollars a week—poor enough pay, since Sugar was the greatest box office draw on the wheel. She was a slender, sinuous girl with tawny hair, whose almost nude dances were flagrantly sensual.

"You've changed," Althea said. "When we hit this burg last season, you thought there was nothing in the world like burlesque."

"I'm wised up since then. Look at the contract Ross gave me—seventy-five a week!"

"You signed it, didn't you?"

"How did I know what I was doing, a green kid like me?"

"Ross didn't know you'd knock 'em dead."

"He knows now, don't he?"

"Sure he knows now, but he ain't Santa Claus."

Sugar pecked distastefully at the filling of a soggy apple pie and pushed the confection from her.

"Look at Nellie Roy, with a shape like a hippopotamus, getting a hundred and fifty per! How does she do it? If she's got sex appeal, so has the Washington Monument!"

"Nellie's got a following. She's been on this wheel as long as I have; and her husband's her manager."

"Look at her shape, I tell you!"

"I know there's a lot of her, but she shakes it all. She gives the boys what they want."

"Aw, I'm sick of this business. Gawd, I'm sick of it!"

"What you want to do—go clerking somewhere for ten smacks a week?"

"I'd like to get married—to a real guy."

"O-o-oh!" Althea nodded understandingly. "Married to a real guy, eh?"

"None of the tramps you meet in this business."

"There's some good guys in this business. Take Charlie De—"

"Yeah, he's a good guy—a good ham-and!"

"Just the same, I heard the Shubert agent was looking him over when we played the Empire in Brooklyn. Lots of burlesque comedians are playing the revues these days."

"Lots of 'em are serving a life sentence on this wheel, too."

"Sugar, you couldn't get out of this business if you wanted to. It's in your blood. You'd die without the ol' hand every day, and seeing the boys go nutty every time you done your specialty. It's a tough racket sometimes, but try to get out—and stay out. Just try!"

"I hate it, I tell you."

Sugar arose and started for the door, but Althea called her back. The older woman reached into a pocket of her raincoat and brought out two soggy envelopes. "A stage hand handed me these," she said. "I forgot 'em in the rush."

Sugar took the envelopes and glanced at them without interest. She tore open one, ran her eyes over its contents, and laughed bitterly.

"Another moron's fallen!"

"Mash note?"

"Listen," said Sugar, and she read aloud:

"DEAR SUGAR:

"I saw your show five times last year, and liked you better every time. I'm the fellow that sit in the front row of the right-hand box with the red sweater this afternoon, what you smiled at. Would you please give me a pitcher?"

"Yours truly,

"ALBERT ERNESSY.

"P. S.—I'll be in the same seat again Wednesday matinée."

"You ought to send him one, Sugar. You can't be slighting your dearly beloved public."

"My public!" Sugar crumpled the note, dropped it to the floor, and crunched it under the heel of one of her imitation French pumps. "Gawd, I'd like to quit this business!"

She slit the second envelope with the pointed nail of her forefinger and scornfully drew forth another note. Althea, watching her casually, saw a new expression on her face.

"This from the guy with the blue sweater in the left-hand box?"

Sugar gave the note a second and more careful reading and tossed it into Althea's lap. It had been penned on hotel stationery. Althea read:

MY DEAR MISS SHANNON:

I am writing to ask—if you consider the request an impertinence, please forgive me—if you would drop into Timkins's after the show to-night and have a bite with me? I'll wait fifteen minutes for you just inside of the entrance.

Since you do not know me, if you do come, I'll take the liberty of speaking first.

Sincerely,

(MAJOR) CLIFFORD L. ENOS.

"What do you think of it?" Sugar asked.

"It only proves what I've always said," said Althea. "I was telling

Charlie De Earl only the other night. 'Charlie,' I says, 'if they'd only let Sugar shake on the big time like they do on this wheel, she'd have crown princes and millionaires falling out of the boxes, instead of exciting these hunkies and ice men to riot.' After all, it shouldn't be so hard for you to knock a general."

"He's a major."

"Major or general, I don't care. They're all the same. They're all men. You could make an Epworth League leader skip Sunday school with that 'She's Got It' number."

Sugar picked up the note and read it again.

"I think I'll go, just for the nuts of the thing," she decided.

"Do what you want, only Charlie and Jimmy and me had kind of figured you'd get back in the game to-night. Going to play in Charlie's room, with a fifty-cent limit."

"Yeah, fifty-cent limit when you start—the sky after the third hand. Charlie's still into me for forty-five smackers. I'm going out and try to stand this soldier up for some swell chow. Wonder where that Timkins joint is!"

The rain had eased up when they left the restaurant, and there was encouraging rift in the leaden cloud banks overhead. Sugar was humming the air of one of her specialty numbers when they entered the theater. A stage hand passed her in the wings.

"Oh, Joe, Joe!" she called.

"Yeah, Sugar?"

"Where's Timkins's?"

"Timkins's! That's the swellest joint in town—Hayward and Broad. All the big society stuff hangs out there. Why?"

"Oh, nothing," said Sugar, and she ran down the iron stairs leading to the

catacombs under the stage, where her dressing room was located.

II

It had stopped raining entirely when Sugar left the theater that night, and she walked the few blocks to Timkins's. Even from the outside, the place had an air of expensive refinement about it. Soft lights shone through blue-curtained windows, and a liveried doorman stood at the entrance. Sugar pushed through a revolving door into a richly appointed foyer.

A hand touched her elbow and she turned around. A slender, athletic-looking man in a double-breasted blue suit was smiling at her. A small, trimly cropped mustache made his age doubtful, but she guessed that he was in his mid thirties.

"Good evening, Miss Shannon."

"Oh, you—you're Major Enos?"

"That's a good guess. I'm awfully glad you came."

He started to help her off with her slicker.

"Oh, don't," she protested. "I came right from the factory, and I look fierce."

Over her protests he slipped off her coat and handed it to a boy. A waiter bowed to him familiarly.

"A table in the corner, Hermann."

"Yes, Major Enos."

The waiter led them across the dance floor to a small table and placed menu cards before them.

"You can have anything you want here," Enos told her. "I recommend the gin."

"I'll have gin."

"Manhattan? Martini?"

"Just gin, and some ginger ale."

He nodded the order to the waiter.

"And a Martini," he added.

Sugar glanced around the room. The members of the orchestra, partly screened behind a cluster of palms, were strumming their instruments. The place was comfortably filled with well-dressed men and women, and there was a low, pleasant confusion of voices.

"This is a swell place," remarked Sugar.

"It is rather attractive."

Enos watched her closely while the waiter was fetching the drinks. She was too heavily made up, but her face was quite as attractive as it had looked from the second row of the theater. He liked her hair, which was the color of faded corn stalks, and the tiny line about each side of her mouth, which gave her face the slightest touch of hardness. He had been attached to a reserve officers' regiment in a civilian community for two years, and he had had enough of soft women.

Her clothes were the chief indictment against her, he decided. There was a cheap flashiness about them which would have been unbearable to a more conventional person.

When the drinks came, she broke the silence.

"Seen the show?"

"How did you think I knew you, if I hadn't?"

"How'd you like it?"

"Fine! That is, I liked your stuff."

"Did you think I was pretty naughty?"

"I think you were pretty alluring. Do you like to do that sort of thing?"

Sugar squinted her small, straight nose.

"I don't know. I used to think I liked it." She reached across and touched his hand with a little confidential gesture. "It's not often guys like you come into the theaters we play.

Most of 'em are a lot of roustabouts. They don't want nothing for their money—nothing at all. Oh, no!"

"They seem to like you."

"Sure! I know what they like, and I give it to 'em. The only way you can be a hit on this wheel is to shake. You got to shake, or you're a flop. I learned that my first season out."

"You've certainly learned it well."

"Sometimes, though, I get disgusted. All those pop-eyed guys looking at you, grinning! Sometimes they look like a lot of—of dirty animals; but other times I don't mind. After all, it's a racket. You don't have to have anything to do with the audience, except in places where they have runways."

"What are runways?"

"Runways running from the stage out over the audience. They make all sorts of passes at you then. I've had 'em grab my legs once or twice. I kicked a fellow for doing that in Cleveland. He got his, believe me!"

"Doesn't it worry you to wear so few clothes in front of a bunch of men?"

"I never think about that. You couldn't, doing it day in and day out. You just don't think anything about it." She stopped suddenly and looked intently across at him. "But don't think, because a girl does what I do, that she's just a bum. You can bet your sweet life I can take care of myself, any old day!"

"I'm very sure you can," he said quietly. "I wasn't thinking anything about your being—a bum."

She sipped her drink slowly.

"Once in a while I go out with guys I meet around, but not often. I'm sick of guys you meet on the road. They're always making passes at you. They think any girl in burlesque is easy."

With a secret wish that her hat had been less ornamental and her make-up more subdued, Enos rose and invited her to dance. He quickly found that she was an adept at ballroom dancing, despite its dissimilarity to her hip weaving efforts on the stage. There was a feel of firm flesh under her scant clothing, and when at one point she pressed lightly against him, his lips brushed across her tawny hair, touched with some faint scent.

They passed couples whom he knew, and these other dancers bowed distantly and whispered when they thought he wasn't looking. He was reputed to be a gay dog, and here was confirmation of the belief.

He had written that note to Sugar with the same impulsiveness that had prompted other indiscretions. He had once proposed to a girl and married her the same day. They had eloped to the Philippines, where, after eleven months, his wife awoke to the realization that a West Point hop and service with native troops were vastly different phases of army life. She left him, and when he saw her next, two years later, she was married to a man whose life was more in harmony with her own.

Enos had served with troops almost continually during his career in the army — the Mexican border, Château Thierry and the Argonne, a hitch in Hawaii. Finally, as a respite from that sort of duty, the War Department had detailed him to act as the regular army executive with a regiment of reserve officers.

After two years of the conventional social activities that are opened to a West Pointer on duty in a civilian community, and with scarcely enough work to occupy him one full day in six, life had become unbearably stupid.

His request for transfer had been in for weeks.

Sugar had appealed to him as a new sensation. Hurrying through the back street in which the Star was located, he had turned into the theater to get out of the rain. The man in the box office gave him a seat in the second row, and he sat through ten minutes of boorish comedy and grotesque dancing, which seemed to delight every one except himself. Then, with a blare of saxophones, Sugar appeared.

Her dance had actually startled him. Nothing that he had ever seen in Hawaii, Paris, or Algeria had been more extreme; and yet there was a saving sense of grace about it, and something almost wholesome in the fresh, clean look of her slender and graceful body. When she finished, he had tried to maintain a dignified reserve, in contrast to the vociferous enthusiasm around him; but at the second encore he became as unrestrained as the rest.

The remainder of the performance was merely a drab background brilliantly punctuated by the four or five appearances of Sugar, during each of which she discarded more clothing until there remained only a slender loin cloth and a tiny band across her breasts.

Enos waited through the first half of the show with a half formed resolve in his mind, and at the intermission dashed out to a near-by hotel and penned the note that Althea had handed to Sugar in the restaurant.

It had been a foolish thing to do, of course. He was thirty-six, with fourteen years in the army, and he had thought that he was past the age of all such thrills. Holding Sugar in his arms, to the strains of the dance music, he was happy, nevertheless, at the result of his impulsiveness.

"What's your real name?" he asked as they returned to their table.

"Sugar Shannon."

"No one ever named you Sugar!"

"The manager did."

"What does your mother call you?"

"She's dead."

"What does your father call you?"

She looked up at him with a tightening of those small lines at the side of her mouth.

"I'd like to hear him call me anything. He's out, the big stiff!"

"But you must have a real name," he insisted.

"Oh, Mary—Mary Shannon. No one would ever get by in burlesque with a name like that."

Tactfully yet deliberately he brought out the story of her early career, and he felt that what she told him was the truth. The "old man" had come home one night, a year after her mother's death, and found her kissing one of the village boys. There had been a scene. The boy had beaten a retreat, partly motivated by a large and vigorously raised shoe. Sugar had talked back, informing her parent that the legal age in her State was eighteen, and that no longer would she submit to parental dictation.

"I wouldn't go back to see him laid out," she said. "He's the meanest, naggin'est guy you ever saw."

They danced together again and again, and when they rode back to her hotel in a taxicab Enos took her in his arms and kissed her.

"You're a great little Sugar," he told her. "I like you."

"I like you, Cliff. You're regular."

He shook hands with her in front of the cheap theatrical hotel in which she lived, and started back to the cab. When he reached the curb, however, she called him back. She put her

hands on his arms and kissed him, untroubled by the fact that a dozen people in the lobby witnessed the act.

"It's kind of a relief to go out with a guy that's not trying to make you," she said, and she turned and fled into the lobby.

Althea, with whom she roomed, was still out, and she descended to the floor below and knocked at Charlie De Earl's door. The usual game was on, with Chominsky, the straight man, in her place.

"Oh, hello, here's the daughter of the regiment!" bantered Althea, turning around. "Unless I'm mistaken, she's got half a can on. Two cards, Jimmy!"

De Earl regarded Sugar with patent disapproval. He was a square-faced young man, who took his comedy very seriously, and rarely smiled except when it was in the act. It was generally rumored that Sugar was his "secret passion," although never by word or act had this rumor been substantiated.

"You gave two rotten performances to-day, Sugar, and Monday's our opener, with the critics looking on."

Sugar dropped into a morris chair and lit a cigarette handed to her by Jimmy Ferguson, the second comic.

"That's good, critics looking on! Half of them newspaper guys that write our shows don't even see 'em. I talked with one at the Elks' party in Rochester. He said all they done was grab a program from an usher and write the show from that."

"I notice you don't lose no time getting down in the lobby Tuesday mornings, to see what they said about you, though!"

"I don't care what they say about me."

"Yes, you *do* care what they say

about you. Don't be giving me no stall like that! And I'll tell you this—"

"Aw, cut it out, you two," interrupted Althea. "Just because you been out with a military man, don't think this is a battle, Sugar. What you going to do, Charlie—stay?"

Sugar picked up a discarded tabloid and glanced through it superficially. When her cigarette was finished, she rose with a yawn.

"I'm going up, Al. See if you can come in without falling over a couple of chairs."

"There's only one chair in our room, deary."

"Well, miss it, if you can. So long!"

III

THE next morning Sugar was up and dressed an hour earlier than usual. Althea, aroused by the movement in the room, rolled over.

"What's the idea?"

"I got a date. It's eleven thirty."

Sugar stood before the blurred mirror and adjusted her small hat. She had on a cloth coat with an antelope collar, new street pumps, and the best frock she owned. Althea observed her sleepily for a moment.

"The general?"

"I'm going to have breakfast with Major Enos."

"Hurray for the U. S. A.! Is he the real guy you been looking for?"

"He's the realest guy I've met yet. He went to West Point, and he's been all over the world."

Althea arose to a half sitting position on one elbow.

"Well, tell him to remember me to Pershing, will you? I suppose we won't see you until the week's run is over?"

"We're booked pretty solid."

Althea nodded and dropped back on the bed as Sugar rubbed her hands tightly down her hipless flanks to smooth out her coat.

"I'm glad, anyway, you got over your grouch. The way you crabbed yesterday was fierce. You were even going to quit."

Sugar swung around sharply.

"Yes, and I may quit yet," she declared. "I'm still crabbing this business. You only got to meet a few real people to realize what a lousy racket this burlesque thing is. I'm just as sick of it as I was yesterday."

"I'd like to see you try to get out of it," challenged Althea. "You'd stand it just about two days, and then you'd be pleading to get back."

"Get back to work for them hunkies we play to? Fat chance! I'll show you one of these days."

Sugar went out, slamming the door after her. From the front of the hotel she hailed a taxi and directed the driver to the Stanley, where Enos had told her he would meet her.

The Stanley was the best hotel in town, and they lunched—or breakfasted—under shaded lights, with cut flowers on the table, and an English waiter to do their bidding. Enos liked her clothes better to-day, although they still showed visible evidences of her profession. Under the warmth of this new environment Sugar expanded and blossomed until she became, he thought, quite lovely. He packed her into a cab at the close of the engagement, paying the driver in advance, and remained at the curb.

"Aren't you coming?"

He shook his head.

"I find I like you so much better when you're away from the theater."

"O-o-oh!" she nodded, not quite understanding. "I see!"

"I'll see you at dinner. Go along, now, or you'll be late."

They dined together between performances, and danced again at midnight; and almost exactly this same program was followed the next day.

Sugar's stage performance had suddenly become listless. Her dancing had lost its spontaneity. At one performance a chorus girl, who was given a chance to "shimmy" outside of the ranks of the chorus, won more applause than Sugar's own specialty.

Charlie De Earl, who was jealous of the prestige of "Hot Babies" as the leading box office attraction on the wheel, and who had been promised a bonus at the end of the season if this record of leadership continued, viewed Sugar's indisposition in sullen silence. To his mind it was little short of criminal.

On Thursday night, in the wings, before her entrance, he edged close to her.

"The Erie Social Club has bought out the whole downstairs to-night," he said.

"What of it?"

"They're giving a party for us at a beer garden after the show. Thought you might want to shake it up a little special for 'em."

"I'm not shaking for any one special—see!"

Charlie's temper, which for two days he had striven manfully to control, got out of hand.

"You'd think you was Gilda Gray! Where'd you get this temperament stuff? I thought you was regular."

"I don't care what you thought. You nor none of the rest of these hams are going to tell me where to get off!"

"You—you—" Charlie began blazingly, but Sugar caught her cue and ran onto the stage.

The Erie Social Club made an audience that would have delighted any burlesque troupe. Bits that merited only slight appreciation won thunderous applause. A feeling of intimacy between members of the audience and the performers sprang up, and the principals singled out men in the front rows and "worked" to them.

Sugar was caught again with the old urge to please, and danced as she hadn't danced in days. She employed all the little artifices that had helped to carry her to supreme popularity on the burlesque circuit. She shook, she wiggled, she dropped a shoulder strap of her *brassière* to her elbow—a trick, crude though it was, that never failed to win half a dozen encores.

Charlie, standing in the wings, forgot his anger. She was knocking 'em again, as only Sugar could. Perhaps there was nothing in this talk about a military admirer.

At the conclusion of her specialty that night the orchestra leader called her back with a wave of his baton and presented her with a bouquet of roses on behalf of the Social Club. Sugar broke off the center flower, and, reaching over the footlights, caught it in his buttonhole. Then she moved off stage with a writhing hip motion that evoked a frenzy of acclaim.

Althea, beaming, came into her dressing room after the performance. The curse of Sugar's indisposition seemed lifted. "Hot Babies" again looked like the fastest show on the wheel.

"Going to the party to-night?"

Sugar, getting into her step-ins, shook her tawny head.

"Got a date," she replied.

"A date? I thought every one was going out to the beer garden."

"I got a date, I tell you."

Althea lighted a cigarette with a match struck on the sole of her pump, and inhaled deeply. Then she dropped down on a trunk and ran a blistering gaze from the soles of Sugar's bare feet to the top of her blond head.

"Where'd you get this stuff, anyway, thinking you're too good for beer gardens and the gang you work with? You give me a sharp pain in the neck!" She drew again on her cigarette, and, removing it from her lips, pointed the glowing end accusingly at Sugar. "You come out to this party to-night, date or no date, or you and me is quits—quits, understand?"

She waited a moment to permit the weight of that ultimatum to register. Sugar sheathed one slender leg in a flesh-colored stocking.

"What am I to do?" she asked. "Burst out crying?"

"We're quits now, eh? All right!"

Althea rose, strode out of the room, and slammed the door.

When Sugar met Enos at a specified corner two blocks from the stage door, she had become a little conscience-stricken about Althea. She didn't care what Charlie, Jimmy, or any one else thought, but Althea had been her pal ever since she had been in burlesque. The older woman had helped her over the hard places, loaned her money, showed her the ropes.

Enos had her arm and was walking her toward a taxi, when she stopped him.

"Where we going, Cliff?"

"Timkins's. Isn't that right?"

"I don't want to go there to-night. I don't think I'd ought to go any place with you."

"What's the matter?"

She explained about the party. On such occasions, particularly when an

organization had bought out the house, the members of the company were expected to attend. It helped business; it was considered a good thing all around.

"You wouldn't go with me, would you?" she asked suddenly.

"Do you suppose I'd be welcomed, not being an actor or a member of the club?"

"Oh, sure! I can pass you in all right. All I was thinking of was the crowd."

"What do you mean?"

"They won't be like the crowd at Timkins's."

He laughed.

"Too tough for me—is that what you're thinking?"

She half nodded.

"Let me tell you something, Sugar. This society soldiering isn't my regular job. I don't like it. I'm not half as gilded a lily as you think. If I can get into this shindig, take me. We'll probably have a good time."

IV

SCHULMAN'S, where the Erie Social Club was entertaining, was typical of the beer gardens of these prohibition days—a large room with innumerable round tables, a small service bar at one end, a nickel piano. A space in the middle of the floor had been cleared for dancing. The party had reached a fair state of hilarity by the time Sugar and Enos arrived.

Althea saw them enter, and waved. Sugar returned the greeting with a cool bow. They were barely seated when the theater manager came over with half a dozen members of the Social Club, whom he presented.

Charlie De Earl danced by with a chorus girl.

"Hello, Ritzy!" he called loudly.

"Charlie's half gone already," Sugar said.

Every one, it seemed, wanted to dance with her. She was the toast of the evening; but Enos was the first to take her out on the floor. The theater's musicians were playing. Waiters were bustling about with beer and steaming sauerkraut and sausages.

"How do you like it?" she asked, pressing close to him.

"I like you," he said a little wildly. "I like you, Sugar!"

They finished the dance and returned to the table. Sugar had scarcely had a chance to touch her beer when the nickel piano began a strident dance air. Two bumptious, half intoxicated youths were demanding a dance. She rose, with a wave to the major, and went out on the floor with one of them.

Enos, gloomy and alone, ordered another beer. He finished it and saw Sugar change partners. A man lurched over to his table and offered him a drink from a pocket flask. The atmosphere of the place was fetid with the odors of beer, sauerkraut, and cheap perfume. He finished a third glass before Sugar returned.

"I'll say you don't waste much time," she told him. "What you going to do—get a quick can on?"

He reached over and put his hand over hers.

"I don't like it here, Sugar."

"I knew you wouldn't. You're a highbrow, no matter what you say."

"I don't mind the crowd, if they'd only leave you alone. I don't like these clowns falling all over you."

"Do you think I'm crazy about it? That last one walked up to my knee and back every other beat of the music; but I'm expected to be here. I'll have to dance alone pretty soon."

"Not in your costume?"

"No, but the same kind of a dance. The boss just told me to. They're going to give me ten bucks."

"I don't like it, Sugar. I don't."

Enos finished another glass of beer and took her out on the dance floor. His feet dragged; they couldn't seem to keep pace with the music. The place was as crazy as pandemonium. He leaned heavily on Sugar.

"Sugar, I love you," he told her thickly.

"You're drunk! Let's sit down. You're getting as bad as these other bohunks."

They reached the table. He took her hand and tried to kiss it. She pulled away.

"Be yourself, Cliff! I don't like you this way."

"I love you," he insisted. "Sugar—Sugar—"

"Yeah?"

"Sugar, I want to marry you."

She laughed loudly.

"That is good! Wait until to-morrow, when I tell you what you just said."

"I'll tell you again to-morrow—to-morrow at noon, when I'm cold sober. I know I'm a little—a little tight now."

"You're tighter than a tick."

"It doesn't make any difference, Sugar—I love you. I want to marry you—now—to-night. I want to get you out of this mess. I hate this crowd. You're too damned good for 'em!"

The manager came over and told her that it was time for her to dance.

"Shake it up, Sugar! Show 'em something. This gang's regular."

"Yeah, they're regular," she agreed cynically. She patted Enos's hand. "Don't fall out of your chair till I come back."

She stopped their waiter and instructed him not to serve Enos again. Then she ran out on the floor. Enos followed her with dull eyes.

The music struck up "Red Hot Lips." Sugar swung into the rhythm, drawing her skirt high above her knees. She pirouetted, twisted, shook her shoulders. Then, steadying down, she began the weaving hip motion for which she was famous.

"That dame's got ball bearing hips," said a knowing youth near Enos.

Five encores were necessary to appease the members of the Social Club. When she finally returned to the table, Enos was staring off into space, an unlighted cigarette caught between the fingers of one hand.

"Come on, Cliff! We're going now. I've done my bit."

"Going?" He looked up. "Where are we going—to the preacher's?"

"Don't be nutty! Come on—I'll give you a hand."

He rose unaided, shook his head vigorously, to throw off the vaporous cloud in which his brain was shrouded, and followed her to the check room.

Althea came running up.

"Ain't you going to introduce me to the boy friend?" she inquired.

"Wait until to-morrow, and maybe I'll introduce you to my husband," Sugar told her in an aside.

"You're not really thinking of anything like that?"

"Why not?"

"Well, I'll be damned!" said Althea, and she turned back to her table, where Charlie De Earl was presiding over a gallon jug of homemade wine that some one had contributed to the festivities.

Enos cleared somewhat when they reached the street.

"I want you to marry me to-night,"

he insisted. "I don't want you to leave me again. I never want you to go back to that stuff, Sugar. I can't stand it!"

"Oh, come on! Here's a taxi." She hailed the driver, and the cab whirled to the curb. "I'll see you to-morrow at the Stanley," she told Enos when she left him at her own hotel. "You can tell me anything you like then."

"I'll tell you just what I've told you to-night," he answered.

True to his promise, he did exactly that. She was amazed that he even remembered what he had said at Schulman's.

"Everything's top hole," he explained gayly. "Look, Sugar—this came this morning."

He thrust a telegram across the table to her. It was an army order to report within ten days at the Mounted Service School at Fort Riley, Kansas.

"That means I'm going back to a regular job—going back to the army, where there's riding, and drill, and the things a man ought to be doing. Understand? You're going with me, Sugar!"

"You really want to marry me, Cliff? You're not nursing a hang-over?"

"I'm as sober as I ever was in my life."

It seemed utterly incredible, and Sugar didn't know what to say. She had never been in love, and she didn't know whether she was in love now; but this man was real, and he was offering her the chance of which she had dreamed. He was watching her eagerly, his hands clasped in front of him on the white tablecloth.

"What do you say, Sugar?"

"Why, Cliff—sure, I'll do it. Thanks!"

"Thanks?" he exclaimed. "Don't thank me. I'm the one that's lucky!"

"But what 'll your friends think about me?"

He dismissed the suggestion with a gesture.

"Your burlesque career is going to be a past performance, a closed chapter. You'll want to polish off a few rough edges, Sugar—you don't mind my telling you that?"

"No, I don't mind."

"You see, Sugar," he went on, "I'm banking on you, because I know you're made of the right stuff. You've seen the seamy side of life, and I want you to see the other side. Of course, Fort Riley isn't a summer colony or a country club; but we won't be there forever, and it isn't far from Kansas City."

"I've got some friends in Kansas City. We play there. That's on the wheel."

"Most of our friends will be army people," he said with a slight emphasis. "We'll stick pretty close to the post for a time."

He told her of his hopes, his ambitions. He wanted to retire at least with the rank of colonel. After Fort Riley he would probably be sent on to the Command and General Staff School at Fort Leavenworth.

"When were you thinking we might be married?" she asked.

"To-day—this afternoon. I don't want you to go back to that theater again."

"Oh, Cliff, I can't do that! I couldn't quit 'em like that. It would break up the show."

"What do you care about the show?" he demanded. "You don't owe the show anything. They can put some one else in your place—some one from the chorus."

"They can't put any one in my place, either!" she retorted warmly.

"Say, Cliff, why do you suppose 'Hot Babies' has been the hit it has on this wheel? It wasn't because of Charlie De Earl, or Jimmy Ferguson, or Al. You ask any one who knows about this business, and they'll tell you it was me. They ought to have my name in big letters on the billing instead of Charlie's."

"I know, dear, but that's all past." He patted her hand. "Please be reasonable!"

"I am being reasonable. Just wanted you to know that not every one can do what I've been doing in that show—not by a darned sight they can't!"

They reached a compromise when Enos reluctantly agreed that she should play the week out. They would be married early Monday morning, and go on to Chicago for a short honeymoon, before reporting at Fort Riley.

There was a luster in Sugar's eyes when she reached the theater. A new and kindlier feeling toward Althea, toward Charlie and Jimmy, and even toward Chominsky, the straight man, whom she had never liked, possessed her, now that she was going to leave all of these old associates.

V

ALTHEA FAWCETT was talking to the house electrician when Sugar came in. She called her friend aside and told her of her decision.

Tears sprang into Althea's eyes.

"You don't really mean it, Sug? You don't really mean you're going to quit?"

Sugar nodded. There was a sensation in her throat that made it difficult to form words. Sugar wasn't a sentimentalist; she rarely cried, except in

anger; but for a moment she wasn't too sure of herself.

"I'm quitting Saturday night," she declared.

Poor Althea was really distressed. She wasn't trying to dissuade Sugar from the course she had decided upon, yet she let her know how difficult it was to get out of the theatrical business and be satisfied with any other kind of life. If the man Sugar was going to marry had been in the profession, she wouldn't have said a word, she declared.

The news spread rapidly. Jimmy Ferguson came over and told Sugar that he wished her luck. Chominsky, the soubrette, and the orchestra leader, all said the same. Chorus girls congratulated her; but Charlie De Earl never went near her. Every one held the secret belief that Charlie was pretty hard hit.

At the two Friday performances Sugar worked with a zest born of a desire to close her career in a blaze of glory. In the evening she literally stopped the show. Four or five times De Earl and Althea tried to play the scene that followed her specialty, and each time they were forced to retire down stage, while the audience clamored for another encore.

Presently Sugar stepped out from the wings and raised a hand for quiet.

"Boys, I'm coming back later on," she promised. "Then I'll give you a real dance—if the police don't stop me. Let the show go on!"

They cheered and laughed, and with good-natured tolerance they permitted De Earl and Althea to continue their scene.

Saturday was a repetition of Friday's triumphs. With Sugar giving her best, the whole show was speeded up. Every one had to be on his toes

to hold the pace she set. After the last performance she dropped down on a property trunk, exhausted by her physical efforts and the excitement of her leave taking.

Jimmy Ferguson stopped on the way to his dressing room.

"Had a regular field day to-night, Sugar," he said. "You certainly been knocking 'em these last two days. It's a crime you're quitting."

When she reached her own dressing room, Althea threw her arms around her.

"I shouldn't say it," she sobbed. "I know I shouldn't say it, but I wish you wasn't going. Kid, you been a great little pal!"

"I'll come and see you when you play Kansas City, Al. Cliff says it's only a couple of hours away."

Althea shook her head sadly and wiped away a tear.

"You'll have new friends then. You'll be mixed up with a new bunch. You won't want us hams hanging around."

"You'll be my pal, no matter what happens, Al. You wait and see. I'm going to write to you every week. If you don't answer, I'll knock you stiff as an icicle!"

Almost every one was waiting on the stage when Sugar came up, and she had to shake hands and say good-by all around. She looked for Charlie De Earl, but he was not in sight. A stage hand told her that he had already left the theater.

She kissed Althea at the stage door.

"Say good-by to Charlie for me. He ducked before I had a chance to see him."

"He always went for you, Sug. He's one of them quiet fellows that don't say much."

"Tell him so long for me, anyway."

There was something flat and uninteresting about Timkins's that night, and after they had danced twice she asked Enos to take her back to her hotel. For some reason the proprietary way he held her in his arms in the cab annoyed her.

"What's the matter, dear? What's happened to my little Sugar?" he pleaded.

"I don't know. Just got the heeby-jeebies, I guess, with all the good-bys and everything. I'll be K. O. in the morning."

But after he had left her, as she went up to her room—which she was now occupying alone, since Althea had left with the rest of the company on the midnight train for Detroit—she was not so sure she was going to be all right in the morning. She couldn't tell just what was the matter. Things were working out almost exactly as she would have them. She was through with burlesque, she was going to marry a man who was conspicuously what she had desired in a husband, and yet there was a vague unrest running through her that made her jumpy and uncertain.

"Gee, life's queer!"

She gathered up a few things, and then decided to leave the rest of the packing until morning; but after she got into bed she couldn't sleep. She wondered what an army post was like. Cliff had told her that they had movies, that they played bridge, and that occasionally they held dances and gave amateur theatricals. Fort Riley must be a small place. She had never heard of it before.

She couldn't sleep; there wasn't any use in trying. She left the bed, touched the electric switch, and began to roam around in search of something to read. Althea had left a *Variety* on the table,

and Sugar turned to the burlesque page.

Oh, so Rita Rich and her "Madcaps" were crowding "Hot Babies" for honors on the Mutual, eh?

"I like that!" said Sugar half aloud. "And Rita looking like a tub of lard this season! Wonder who the guys are that write that stuff?"

She was annoyed when she thought of the way they billed Rita. It was always "Rita Rich and the Madcaps," and below, in small type, the name of the comedian. Rita got a hundred a week. If she, Sugar, had only had a fair break, things might have been different!

She went back to bed and lay there wondering how one ought to feel when one was in love. She wished she could discuss this really momentous question with Althea Fawcett. Althea usually had a few ideas on any subject; and Sugar's mind was full of doubts. Did you want to be with the person you were in love with all the time, every second? Did you think about him all the time and worry about him?

She had begun to think that this love stuff was the bunk. Anyway—yes, she would admit it to herself—she didn't think she was in love with Cliff—that is, not yet. It probably would come in time.

VI

It didn't seem that Sugar had been asleep more than half an hour when the whir of the telephone bell awakened her. Of all the nerve! If that was Cliff, she would kill him. She had told him particularly that she didn't want him to call for her until noon.

A broad yellow bar of sunlight lay across the foot of her bed. She looked at her wrist watch and saw that it was

not quite nine o'clock. The nerve of some people!

For a moment she lay inert, and then the whirl of the bell began again. She flung her bare feet out of bed and grasped the receiver.

"Hello!" she cried angrily. Then, after a pause, she spoke in a more restrained voice. "All right, but why call me in the middle of the night? All right! Yeah, come on up—I'll be ready."

She dashed some cold water over her eyes, brushed her teeth, slipped her feet into a pair of worn satin mules, and enveloped herself in a dressing gown. There was a rap on the door. She turned the key and opened the door, and Paul Ross entered.

He didn't take his hat off until he had crossed the room and seated himself in the only chair. Sugar sat on the edge of the bed.

Ross was a thin, nervous man in his early thirties, who was too studiously well dressed. He pulled a pink silk scarf from around his stiff blue collared shirt and threw back his fur-lined overcoat.

"I know you're a tough baby to handle before you've had your morning Java, Sugar, and this is a long time before; but I want to get down to cases. I was in Omaha when I heard about this, and I done two nights on the sleepers to get here."

"Yeah? And why the rush?"

"I want to talk turkey with you—cold turkey."

"You're just about a week late."

"What d'ye mean, a week late? You're not gone yet, are you?"

Sugar laughed at the panic registered on his features.

"To-morrow—to-morrow morning at ten thirty. Can you come?"

Ross threw one leg over the other

nervously and lighted a cigarette. He puffed jerkily for a few moments and then resumed.

"Before I say another word I want to show you some new billing I've got up. It's rough—I just sketched it out; but you'll get the idea."

He brought out from an inside-pocket a folded piece of foolscap and handed it to her. Sugar opened the paper and read in large, penciled print:

SUGAR SHANNON

The Girl with the Million Dollar Figure
and her very own

HOT BABIES

also

Charlie De Earl

Ross leaned forward eagerly.

"How do you like it?" he inquired.

"It's no more'n what's been coming to me," replied Sugar.

"Certainly it's no more'n what's coming to you. You're sore because I didn't have your name up there before, I know; but here I am with three shows on my staff, running all over the country after 'em. I've been busier than a one-legged hooper. I can't do everything at once, Sugar."

"Yeah, and how about money? Look what I get, and look what some of these beefy Flossies that ought to be working on the docks get!"

"I got you there, too. For Christmas this year I was going to give you a new contract with a thirty-five-dollar raise—for Christmas, mind you. Now you gone and made me spoil the surprise. I know what you done, Sugar. I know how you're knocking 'em dead all over the wheel; but give a guy a chance to get around and do things, will you? Here you're going off half cocked—"

"I told 'em all I'm through with this business."

"Sure, you're through with it!" Ross left his chair and paced back and forth across the room. "Sure! What you want to do is quit and settle down and get nice and fat and read about some kid that ain't got one-half your stuff being copped off for a lead in the 'Follies' or one of the other big revues, just like has happened before. You'll have the little home and the husband, and what 'll you care you ain't the big shot you might 'a' been if you'd stuck? You should be annoyed!"

He stopped in the middle of the room and hunched one shoulder expressively.

"There's the cards on the table. I'll say no more, I just come all the way from Omaha to show you I'm on the square."

Sugar was studying the rough draft of the proposed billing.

"How big are these letters going to be where it says 'Sugar Shannon'?" she inquired.

"About three inches high. The next

line won't be so big, of course. 'Hot Babies'—that 'll be about two inches, and Charlie's name 'll be an inch."

"Does it go on all the billing and the program like that—'Sugar Shannon and her very own Hot Babies'?"

"You bet your life it does! You're the feature of this show, Sugar. We're even going to put your name up in the lights, when we can—that is, we was going to."

"And the hundred and ten sheets a week goes?"

"It would have gone, if you'd stuck."

"Does it go now?"

"Why, Sugar, what you talking about?"

"Does it go now, I ask you?"

"Sure it goes now. I'll put it right in the new contract."

Sugar sprang from the bed.

"Beat it! Get out of here!" she ordered. "I got to dress and pack. Maybe there's a train for Detroit this morning!"

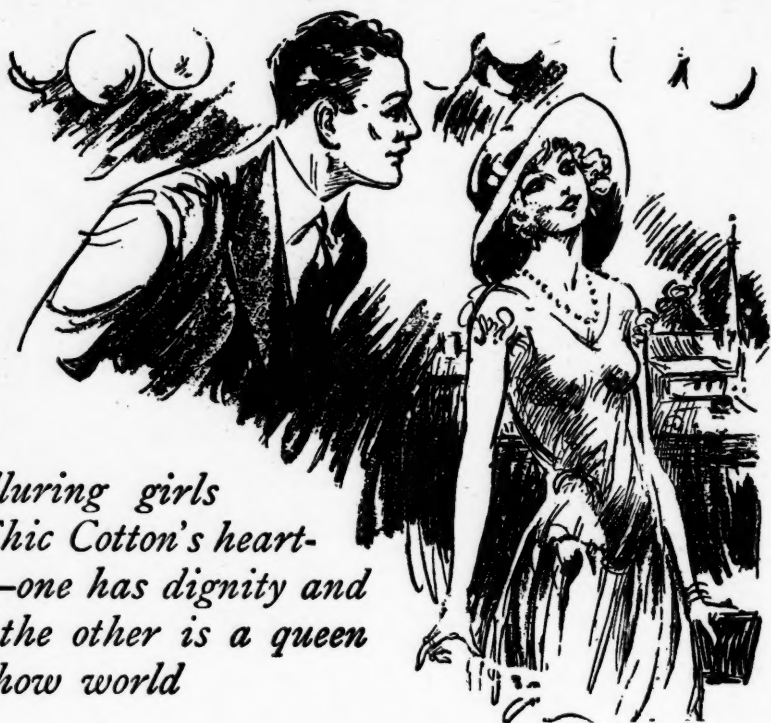


A PARTING CALL

MISTRESS ROSEBUD called to-day—
 Came to say good-by;
 She is going far away,
 'Neath a southern sky;
 Finds the autumn rather chill—
 Deems it best to go
 Ere the winter breezes fill
 All the land with snow.

Seems a fragile sort of thing,
 Starting out alone—
 Quite unused to traveling
 In a distant zone;
 But she tells me, with a blush—
 What you will infer!—
 That her little friend, the thrush,
 Goes along with her!

John Kendrick Bangs



*Two alluring girls
tug at Chic Cotton's heart-
strings—one has dignity and
culture, the other is a queen
of the show world*

Coney Island

A new novel by Homer Croy

Author of "West of the Water Tower," "They Had to See Paris," etc.

THE THREAD OF THE STORY

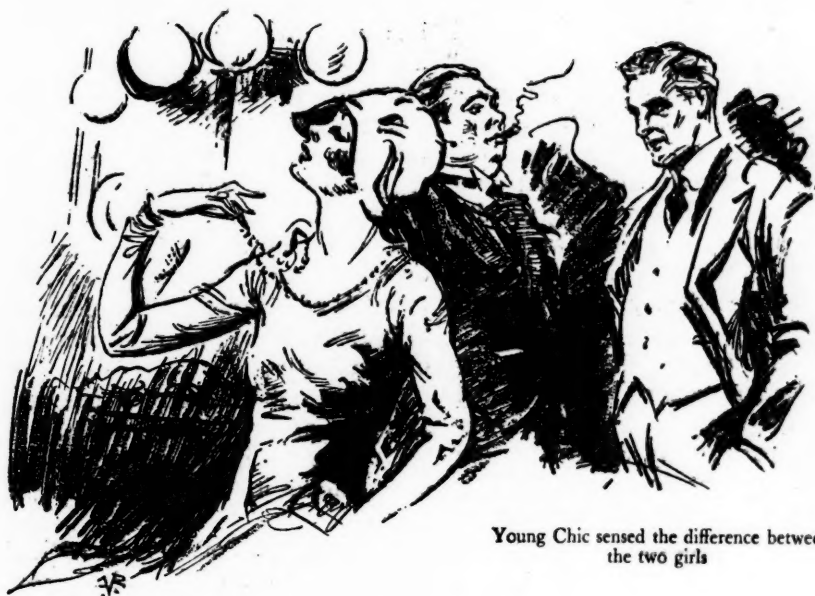


CHIC COTTON, an unsophisticated inventor of twenty-two, set forth from his home town in the mid-west to conquer the great city of New York. He had bright dreams of fame and fortune.

He did not know—how could he know?—that an æsthetic dancing class for girls would be located on the ground floor of his boarding house;

that he would peep at the enticing nymphs from the fire escape, and that he would develop a growing fondness for one of those nymphs that would eventually—but that is going ahead of the story.

When Chic was nineteen, three years before he left Junction City, a girlhood friend of his mother's visited the house, bringing an altogether lovely daughter, Charmian De Ford, who was cultured, winsome and beautiful.



Young Chic sensed the difference between the two girls

She stayed there only a few days; long enough for Chic and Charmian to form an idealistic friendship, which gradually faded into vague memories after the girl had returned to her wealthy home on Long Island.

But now that Chic was living within an hour's ride of Floral Gardens, he determined to renew the friendship. Calling on Charmian, he found her more sweetly dignified than before, and slightly aloof, but apparently still fond of him.

Then came one of those minor tragedies which seems like the end of the world at the time it occurs. Chic accidentally bumped into and shattered a miniature Swiss chalet, delicately built out of ice as a surprise in honor of Mr. De Ford's election as president of a golf club.

Humiliated, he left Charmian early that evening, and, upon returning to his boarding house, saw through a crack in a door the rhythmic flash of twenty bare legs, so he scurried out to

the fire escape to observe the display of femininity more closely. He picked out the girl whom he regarded as most shapely and vivacious, introduced himself, and took her to a night club.

She proved to be Queenie Johnson, a tight-rope walker, advertised far and wide as "Coney Island's Sweetheart."

Later he visited Coney Island, viewed her act with unbounded admiration, and became acquainted with her friends, the various freaks, performers and concessionaires at Coney, discovering the human side of their private life. The novelty and glamour of it all fascinated him.

While living at Junction City, Chic had originated a device from which he hoped to become wealthy—a Giant Top, with little cars shuttling in and out, for use in amusement parks.

And now that he had been presented to the Coney Island set by Queenie, he visualized the construction of that top by Joel Zimmerman, known as the "King of Coney Island," promoter of

amusement parks, builder of rides—a crude, rough-and-ready but powerful figure.

Queenie, a protégée of Zimmerman's, agreed to help him to get this invention developed. Chic visited the girl often at her dressing room over the "World in Wax," and gradually fell in love with her, an affection which she shared in her own slangy, superficial but tremendously warm-hearted way.

Meanwhile he had found employment in a radio factory. Thoughts of Queenie brightened his outlook considerably; particularly the evening he first realized that love had actually come into his life.

CHAPTER XV

A FAVORITE OF THE GODS



THAT evening Chic Cotton walked up the soggy, slightly smelly stairs to his room, made the turns, ran his fingers along the winding banisters—what a long way it was to-night. What a tremendous love had come into his soul since last he had been in the room!

Sometimes life just seemed to creep along; nothing happened; everybody else in the world seemed to be doing interesting things and having wonderful adventures and making lots of money, and nothing—absolutely nothing—happened to him, and then all of a sudden came a revelation bigger than anything that had ever occurred to anybody before.

He thought of the jumble of people plowing their way along the streets. Nothing like that had ever come into their lives; they might have held a girl in their arms and kissed her, but never in the deep emotional way he had.

His mother's picture was looking at him when he came into the room, and a desire came over him to write her. He had neglected her, he decided. There was her last letter on the bureau, the torn, lacerated ends, where he had ragged it open with his fingers, were staring at him. He had glanced through it and carelessly had tossed it on his bureau. So many other things to think of. When he had first come to New York he had read every line, over and over.

He got out his fountain pen, made a couple of preliminary scratches on the corner of his envelope box, and then started it. "Dear Mother," it began.

(When Mrs. Cotton received it she was very proud of it, indeed, for it was warm and glowingly alive. "He's such a dear, manly son," she thought, as she read the letter. Now that old Aunt Lavinia's money would soon be hers, she could do something for him. Possibly, when things got straightened around, she could go to New York to see him. She had the sense of a sun-beam dancing through her soul.)

Now Chic had finished the letter; time to go to bed. He paused a moment in front of his bureau. The Sweetheart picture smiled at him. He stood looking at it longingly. But he must do what was right. Wetting a corner of the towel he scrubbed off the picture.

And then he turned off the light.

A week passed, and now Chic stood before the little steel locker at the radio factory, changing from his jumpers into the best suit he had, for to-day was the big day. To-day was the day he was to see Mr. Zimmerman, and Mr. Zimmerman would say "Yes." There was no doubt about it.

Chic had fastened a mirror to the steel door of his locker, and now he stood peering at himself and arranging every hair as Nature intended it should be.

He picked up the precious canvas bag, which he had recovered from the grease joint. What if there should be a wreck on the subway and the top should be smashed, or what if he should lose it? He had heard of such things. A slight shiver passed over him. No, nothing like that would happen to it, and he would be there at exactly five o'clock, the hour set by Mr. Zimmerman.

CHAPTER XVI

THE MAN OF DESTINY



VISITOR going through Coney Island doesn't observe very much. He sees merely a forest of steel trees with a flock of roller coasters chasing each other in and out like monkeys; he sees a constantly changing kaleidoscope of circle swings, merry-go-rounds, dips, chutes, sky chasers; a woman sitting on an orange crate nursing a child; a blind man in the midst of the revelry playing mournfully on an accordion; a couple of thousand men selling hot corn on the cob, and a few million electric lights. That's all. He doesn't discover what makes the wheels go round.

It's like a person going to an electric power station and seeing the walls of the building and the pretty pictures in the manager's office and going away without having viewed the dynamos.

One of these dynamos was Joel Zimmerman. A silent, steadily turning, never diverted dynamo. He had raised himself from nothing to the most powerful man in Coney Island,

and he had done it in a silent, almost wordless way—a method almost unknown among amusement park men. They are talkers, voluble men, storytellers, yarn spinners, entertainers, the life of the club car, are these big showmen of the amusement parks. But not Zimmerman. He was a rare man—he used words only to convey thought.

As a boy, Joel had labored in his father's blacksmith shop, heating bars to a glowing yellowish-red, and making them into strange and fanciful designs which, to his father, was damned foolishness, and a waste of good coal. A streak of the artistic had always been in young Zimmerman, and he had not been content to pump the bellows.

"I'm going to be an architect," he had said, and had begun going to a night school. During the day he toiled in an architect's office in the little town on Long Island where he was born. While working there the town had voted to have an exposition in memory of its founding, and to offer a prize for the best design for a midway plan and a court of honor.

"I'm going to get that," Zimmerman had said, and when the judges had made their decision he had won the prize of two thousand dollars.

Most boys of his age—he was still nineteen—would have taken the money and put it on display, but not Zimmerman. Already concessionaires had come looking for places to operate at the Long Island exposition. One of them had a scenic railway, or, as it was known in the amusement park world, a "gravity ride," and was looking for a partner. Young Zimmerman studied the ride, suggested a few simple improvements, and put in his money. When the exposition was over he was a comparatively rich man. He had over four thousand dollars.

"What are you going to do with all your money?" people asked.

"I'm going to get out of this," he said. "There's no real money in merely operating a ride."

It was the first time he was called crazy, and they were partially right, for no normal man in full possession of his faculties would become an amusement park builder and promoter. It is a small graveyard, but it's a crowded one, and many creative geniuses sleep within its green folds. One is Frederic Thompson, who built Luna Park and the New York Hippodrome before he was thirty, and whom at forty-six kindly friends chipped in and buried.

"It gets them all, sooner or later," is an expression in the world of amusement parks. "All they have to do is to stick at it long enough."

A man will conceive an idea for an amusement device, or a park, or the promotion of a new beach, and will throw himself into it. He rises to the top, he swims. "I'm a pretty clever man," he says, and ventures out a little farther from shore. The funeral is short but impressive.

Thus, by all tokens, it should have been with Zimmerman. He should have had two or three successes, and thus encouraged, should have made a mighty splurge, and then the auctioneer should have come with his red flag. Many a man more capable, and with better financial backing than Zimmerman, had tried just such schemes, and had spent his declining days on the charity of relatives.

But Zimmerman wasn't that kind. "There's money in the park business, and I'm going to get it out." And he did.

He had, in the terms of the amusement park world, "followed the

fairs." The first was the Jamestown Exposition at Norfolk, Virginia. As soon as the concessions were let, and the construction of the devices began, young Zimmerman showed up with a set of blue prints which gave the old heads a hearty laugh. "The Honeymoon Trail," he called his device.

The other rides were constructed on the principle of speed and thrills. The public must be jostled and bumped about, "the lady must squeal."

Young Zimmerman turned up with his slow, poky "Honeymoon Trail." Instead of being rushed through thrills and perils at terrific speed, the young lovers went drifting gently and smoothly along as if in a dream; no sudden winds struck them, no skeletons leaped out at them, no horrible noises pursued them. Pleasant scenes met their eyes, colored lights changed slowly and enchantingly; there were dark, lovely passages, with a sound of rippling waters.

"You won't last two weeks," predicted the old showmen, who knew all about the public. "You haven't got a thrill in it."

"Go on and do it your own way," Zimmerman answered as he opened his ride, and it was the sweet dream of all showmen—"a repeat ride."

When the exposition was over and the gates were closed, Zimmerman was one of the few who had made money out of that burying ground.

From there he went other places, trying this, trying that, especially attempting things which other showmen said couldn't be done.

"Where you men lay down is where I begin," he retorted.

And then he opened at Coney Island, which had been his goal from the day he put his first money into a gravity ride. He now had more ground leases

and owned more concessions than any other individual on the Island.

No one on the Island was so relentless in pursuit of money as Zimmerman was, nor so cold and calculating and heartless in his revenge, once he had turned against a person.

There was the way he had dealt with Mike Galotti. Mike was one of Zimmerman's concessionaires, the operator of a rabbit race. He was one of the best and most honest of the Coney concessionaires, but "the breaks" had been against him. There had been two seasons of rain, ground rent was going up, radio was cutting the crowds, and Mike had been tempted to "gaff" his device. He had loosened a board in the floor, out of sight of the public, and by lightly pressing the board he could control the rabbit which won.

One day Zimmerman passed as the people were lined up in front of the game, working the little handles which sent the mechanical rabbits skipping across their clover patch. Mike, in his shirt sleeves, stood adding to the excitement of the race by clanging the finish bell.

Mike was more than the operator of a rabbit race; in other parts of the Island he had a candy pull, two weighing chairs, and a mechanical palm reader and fortune teller. But these were small and unimportant concessions in comparison with his rabbit race.

As he passed, Zimmerman's quick eye read the irregularity in the rabbits. Without a word he wormed his way through the fringe of people and leaned over the counter. Mike's foot was on the loose board. Zimmerman waited a moment, unseen by Mike, until the race was over and the bell no longer clanged.

"I want to see you to-night, after the gate." Zimmerman spoke so quietly that hardly any one noticed.

"I guess you know what I want," he said later. "What you got to say for yourself?"

Mike tried to appeal to the cold, silent man sitting at his desk. The weather had been rotten, he explained, no crowds; he had just put on the gaff that day. Of course he shouldn't have done so, but he hadn't been making expenses, and the simple device added to the interest of the race.

"I'm going to give you just three days to get it out of my park. That's all," said Zimmerman, turning back to his work.

It was a severe blow to Mike Galotti, but, according to the lease he had signed, it could be done. The season was half over, the news would fly around the tight little amusement park world. Mike tried to appeal to him—there were other concessions in Coney which gaffed their appliances. It was easy to put in a tiny slug, or to have a screw head which, when pressed down, made a contact.

"Won't you let me stay, Mr. Zimmerman?"

The wordless, silent, slow-moving boss did not look up from his desk.

"I guess you didn't understand. I said three days. I ought to made it two."

Mike had gone. It meant that he must play country fairs, a disastrous comedown to a man who had had a forty-foot park concession at Coney Island.

And now, as Chic walked along the street of Coney Island, carrying his canvas bag, Zimmerman sat in his office, waiting. On his desk calendar he had made a note of the engagement. He had not scrawled it hastily and

carelessly, as many another man might have done, but instead had printed it neatly and in the regular letters which, as an architect, he had learned to make. This was what it said:

"Cotton, see model, 5."

CHAPTER XVII

ZIMMERMAN MAKES AN OFFER



HERE was a slight tap at the door and Mr. Zimmerman's secretary entered.

"A young man by the name of Mr. Cotton is here, says he has an engagement with you."

"Send him in."

As Chic entered he had the sense of being in a studio rather than in an office. On the walls were half-completed sketches of roller coasters, circle swings, over-the-falls; other and more elaborate sketches were labeled "A Trip to the Moon" "Life in a Submarine," and "The Treasure Room of the Incas."

On the desk in front of Zimmerman sprawled a *papier-mâché* dragon, its head completed and gayly colored, but with bits of canvas patched along an unfinished spidery skeleton. About the place were samples of canvas, samples of carnival suits and highly colored beach umbrellas left by ambitious salesmen.

On the wall was a cluster of half-deflated balloons, with advertising matter printed on their wrinkled sides. When the door swung to behind Chic they bobbed violently, tugging at their strings.

As Chic's eyes leaped about the room, he saw among the pictures and photographs on the walls the brilliant red splash of the original drawing of the Sweetheart picture.

He experienced a moment's uneasiness, and then the feeling passed away; it was only natural that Mr. Zimmerman would have a picture of Queenie in his office. Wasn't he the one who had hired her? Didn't he pay her salary? Why, of course, it was all right.

Chic advanced with a quick, businesslike step. That was the way to walk—show Mr. Zimmerman that he was an up-and-comer. People who made great successes had pep and zip and go.

"How' do, Mr. Zimmerman. How're you to-day?" he said briskly. Zimmerman's thick, hard lips opened.

"What do you want to see me about?"

It was one of Zimmerman's tricks. He used it even when he had sent for people. Immediately it gave him the advantage, for it was then the other person who sought the favor.

"About my invention, Mr. Zimmerman. I—I think I've got something pretty good."

His hand made an eager motion toward the brown bag.

"What about it?"

"I want to show it to you. I think you're going to like it," he repeated. He waited a moment, privately struggling with a strange dryness in his throat. "You've got nice offices here," he began again. "Is this where you do your work?"

But Zimmerman had no intention of talking about himself.

Chic tried again, made several little attempts; big crowd out to-day; that was fine, because the weather had been running pretty bad lately, especially Sundays . . . all the while he felt Zimmerman silently weighing him.

"I'm glad to meet you personally,

Mr. Zimmerman. I knew who you were before I left my home in the Middle West to come to New York."

Zimmerman made a slight move and Chic felt himself hastily picking up his bag.

"Would you like me to tell you how I got the idea for it, Mr. Zimmerman?" he appealed. "You know, that first flash?"

"No."

Still watching him, Zimmerman opened a desk drawer, put his hand into a box of cigars, and, without looking at it, chose one, bit off the end and inserted it in his mouth. Then he applied a gold lighter.

"How long have you known Miss Johnson?"

For a moment, in his confused state, the name was a blank to Chic, so firmly had the name "Queenie" become fixed in his mind.

"Oh, Miss Queenie Johnson?" Now he would show him how well he knew her; that would bring him and Mr. Zimmerman together. "I haven't known her so long, but—well, it seems like a long time. Some people are that way, aren't they? You can know them for years and you don't know them any better than when you started. In actual time," he concluded, "it's been about three months, I reckon."

"Nice girl, isn't she?"

Chic moved closer with a sudden friendly feeling.

"She sure is," he enthused. "I think you've got an awfully big find in her, Mr. Zimmerman, really I do. Just look at all the crowds that pour out to see her. And you've handled her well, too—I mean the way you've advertised her and so on." His eyes fastened on the Sweetheart drawing. "That's a fine idea, too," he declared. "Did you think of it yourself?"

"I did."

"Oh, did you? It strikes you right in the eye; you can't forget it, either."

But he mustn't continue to talk; he must show the model while Mr. Zimmerman was in the right mood. He pulled off the cover.

"There it is, Mr. Zimmerman. Excuse me and I'll attach it in the light socket and you can see how it works."

Zimmerman made a gesture with a short, stubby, hair-rimmed hand.

"The important thing is the blue prints. Did you bring them?"

"Yes, sir."

"Let's see them."

A chill came over Chic as he sat there, while Zimmerman laid the blue prints on the desk. Faintly in the distance came the dull roar of a roller coaster, the park band was now drumming up a crowd for the late afternoon performance; and faintly, as if through a poor telephone connection, was the cry of the barkers for the side shows, while suddenly, almost under the window, rose the quick, piercing sound of a reed playing a wild Egyptian piece for the Streets of Cairo.

Then, unaccountably, as Chic looked at Zimmerman, there rose before him the scene that night at the Dog Wagon when Zimmerman had reached out and patted Queenie's hand.

In the midst of the confusing thoughts and sounds pouring through his mind, he saw Zimmerman look up. Now he must answer him, make a good impressive reply.

But Zimmerman did not ask that kind of question.

"Has Miss Johnson seen your model?"

"Yes, I showed it to her."

"Did she like it?"

"Yes, sir, she thought it was fine. Said she thought people'd be sure to

like it." Chic smiled and in his voice there was a tone of friendly intimacy. "But, of course, her opinion wouldn't be professional, like yours."

Zimmerman's hand made a gesture toward the box.

"Smoke?"

Chic had no liking for cigars, but now he put one into his mouth and leaned forward to the flame as if it were the one unmixed joy of his life.

"You know Miss Johnson pretty well, don't you?"

Chic gave a friendly, eager smile. "Oh, yes, quite well," he was about to answer, when something in Zimmerman's voice made him hesitate. Was it possible that the big fellow was interested personally in Queenie? No, that couldn't be—he was too old, nearly forty, maybe. But what did that tone mean, and that long unwavering look which Zimmerman leveled at him? The smile died away on Chic's face, his fingers made a little nervous movement.

"No, sir, not very well," he answered.

The immovable Zimmerman gazed in silence a moment. As he studied the blue prints he asked questions, now and then glancing up at Chic. Had Chic intended it to be of dome truss construction? Was there any method of safety underfriction? How were the loading platforms to be arranged?

At last, Zimmerman swung slowly around in his chair. Chic's heart gave a leap. The big moment had come!

"There is" — Zimmerman paused; an agonizing delay; a puff of smoke shot out—"an idea in it."

But that didn't necessarily mean it would be a success. With the great weight supported on one axis it might go wrong—his hand paused in the air and Chic understood what it meant if

an amusement device, freighted with human beings, suddenly crashed.

"He's going to accept it, he is, he is!" the youth said to himself, feeling a great exaltation.

"Of course," continued Zimmerman, now leaning across the desk, "you know it's going to cost a lot of money to build this and give it a try out, and even then I don't know whether the public will want it or not. I've seen too many flops to make any statement about that."

The sweet little song in Chic now became a pæan. "I know he's going to accept it, I know he is." All at once he felt a warm friendliness for the man. "I could almost throw my arms around him and kiss him," he thought ecstatically.

Zimmerman was still speaking. "I'll take it on and make one full size, practical, working structure and put it in my park and give it a try out."

"Thank God! Thank God!" a voice shouted in the inventor's heart, prematurely.

"But," continued Zimmerman, pausing and looking at Chic carefully, "it will cost more than I ever put into a ride. If you'll raise and invest four thousand dollars yourself, I'll take it on."

For a second Chic had the curious feeling that he had not heard correctly, and yet he knew that he had. Four thousand dollars. A fortune! Why, if he worked and saved for years he would not be able to collect that much money.

"What?" he asked automatically.

"I said I'd take it on if you'll raise four thousand dollars yourself."

Now he'd had a moment to collect his wits. He mustn't let a big man like Zimmerman think he was a piker. Just shake his head and say it was a

lot of money; it 'd save his face; maybe he could get somebody else to build it. But who?

At last he rose, now very business-like again.

"Is that your best proposition, Mr. Zimmerman?"

"It is."

The interview was now over, and Chic opened the door.

"Good day, Mr. Zimmerman. I'll have to think it over."

The door swung shut, the cluster of wrinkled balloons bobbed and Chic, carrying his little brown bag, started down the street.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE SEVENTH HEAVEN



RS. COTTON, Chic's mother, glanced at the clock on the little oak sideboard in her home in Junction City. Surely she would get a letter from Chic. Usually he wrote twice a week, but for almost a week now she hadn't heard from him.

Often she wondered what kind of life he was living in New York. Would he be tempted—show the weakness his father had shown? But no, she answered herself, there was no danger of that. *Other* boys might go to a big city and do unworthy things, but *her* son wouldn't.

One thing which pleased her was Chic's acquaintance with Charmian. How nice and splendid that was, his mother thought. And in his letters she had followed the progress of Chic's growing friendship with the daughter of her girlhood friend.

But one thing she did *not* know. She was not aware that such a sprightly person as Miss Queenie Johnson ex-

isted in all the world.

The mail man, with the leather bag over his shoulders and bent slightly forward as he walked, was cutting across her yard from the house he had just left.

"Good morning, Mrs. Cotton. I guess you get a letter from Chic all right to-day. Here it is. A fat one this time. Hot, isn't it?" continued the purveyor of news, as he took off his cap and mopped his brow.

But Mrs. Cotton wasn't interested in the weather, now that she had Chic's letter. She sat down in her favorite rocking-chair by her south window, and with scissors neatly cut open the envelope. These were to be reckoned as the happiest minutes of her life, these minutes in her rocking-chair by her flower-filled window, reading her son's letters.

This time, after glancing at the inclosures, she sensed a different note in the letter. He had tried to make it bright and casual, but with a mother's understanding she had read between the lines. When she finished she knew all. His top couldn't be made, as the man would undertake it only on the ground that Chic would put in four thousand dollars. Blue prints and estimates were submitted with the personal message.

"That doesn't mean anything," Chic's letter finished bravely. "There are plenty of other ride builders."

But Mrs. Cotton caught the touch of despondency. Still holding the letter in her hand, she bent forward, broke off a dead leaf from one of the flowers and unconsciously rolled it between her fingers.

Four thousand dollars! It would take almost all of old Aunt Lavinia's money—and she had meant to do so much with it, finish paying for her

home, invest the rest, lay something by for a rainy day, and yet—

Slowly she rolled the unnoticed dead leaf between her fingers, the leaf growing smaller and smaller.

Her little brown-haired, blue-eyed boy seemed to be in the room again with her, this room where they had spent so many golden hours together. Again he seemed to be on the footstool looking up into her eyes, her darling boy.

"I'm going to do it," she said to herself. The leaf was now a little dead ball, and, opening the screen, she dropped it outside. "I couldn't do anything else."

And although she would debate it for days, her mind had been made up.

Now she must go on with her housework—cleaning, dusting—but she was doing something for her son, the boy who had been disgraced and deserted by his father.

Mr. De Ford was surprised, later, when he received a letter from Mrs. Cotton, inclosing blue prints and other data, asking him if he would, without saying anything to Chic, investigate a Mr. Zimmerman at Coney Island, and report.

He was surprised in more ways than one. He had heard Chic talk about the invention, and he had seen the curious, gayly colored globe, which to him looked like a child's toy, but he hadn't taken it seriously.

The letter had increased his respect for Chic. A boy that young to be able to work out an invention of such importance! But who was this man at Coney Island who wouldn't go ahead without having four thousand dollars tossed into his lap?

"That doesn't look so good," he muttered. Something queer about it.

But when he had taken the blue prints and specifications around to other builders he found that Zimmerman's offer was a fair one. It was close, it was shrewd, the big man was looking out for number one, but it was a better offer than he could get elsewhere.

Personally Mr. De Ford would rather have had Chic perfect an invention in a more worth-while field—the automatic gasoline station device seemed more sound—but still, people must be amused. Amusement in America was becoming as staple a product as groceries.

What kind of success the top would have after it was finished and offered to the public, no one knew. The opening of a new ride was as big a gamble as the opening of a new play. It might go, might be a great success; and then, on the other hand, the waves of oblivion might quietly close over it.

After he had made his investigations he told Chic, one evening when Chic was at the house, that he wished to talk to him.

"If you're not too busy, I want to read you a letter," he said with genial humor after they had gone into the drawing-room, where the coffee was served. "It's from your mother."

"From my mother?" thought Chic. Why was she writing him?

"It's about your top," continued Mr. De Ford, enjoying the bewilderment on Chic's face. "In fact, she's written me several letters."

But he would not torture the youth any longer.

"It looks favorable, so far," Mr. De Ford finished. "I checked up on Zimmerman pretty carefully. I want to go down there and meet him—ask him some questions—and if he gets by, I think I'll advise going ahead with the proposition."

The room seemed to volatilize and float away. Oh! the thrill, the exquisite pleasure of it! Suddenly Chic felt a very warm, very deep emotion stirring for his mother who would give up most of the money which meant so much to her. Did he have a right to risk it? What if something should go wrong?

But nothing *could* go wrong. He would give Zimmerman the money, the top would be built, it would be a great success, he would be rich, and then — he visualized Charmian sitting in a deep chair. How lovely she was!

CHAPTER XIX

A MOMENTOUS VISIT



THIS is what you would have seen if, a few days later, you had been standing on Surf Avenue, which is the Main Street of Coney Island, at about half past five in the afternoon:

A Chinatown tong war, an opium den with terrible looking wretches lurching off to hell; a beheading in Old China, with the dripping, decapitated head dangling by its pigtail from a bent bamboo pole; and the latest in murders—all in the Chamber of Horrors, of course, at the wax works.

You'd have seen huge barrels turning, with people trying to walk through them, and succeeding only in getting their heads in places usually reserved for feet; you'd have seen the "cooch shows," seen the dancing girls from the harem, heard the piercing, stimulating, haunting music as a swarthy, hatchet-faced man in a fez fingered a wailing lute; seen the snake shows, the pit shows, the carrousels, the wax works, the open-faced, walk-in photograph galleries.

You'd have seen all the sights, smelled all the smells, heard all the sounds, and caught the feel and throb of life in that queer, absurd, necessary, blow-off-steam place, Coney Island. And if you had looked at the caravan of cars rolling down the street you'd have seen one with three passengers in it, and a chauffeur. And that is the one we are interested in.

As the car rolled along this is what Mr. De Ford thought:

"Is it possible that this is the place where I used to have such a good time? It must have changed! Of course it has. Well, it isn't what it used to be. Why, it was fascinating then. Now look at the cheap people, and the gaudy jimcracks, and at the hawkers selling them. Look at the people throwing balls at wooden milk bottles. What possible good will it do if they knock them down? When people go out for a holiday, their reason seems to desert them completely."

To Chic he said:

"There's certainly a lot of claptrap here. Pretty cheap place as a whole."

Chic heard him with amazement. How could a person think that? Why, Coney was wonderful, fascinating, amazing! One could never tire of it.

The car is now passing the World in Wax. Chic looks up, his eyes rest on a room at the top, above the exhibition floor, and his heart gives a curious little leap. No one seeing that slight glance, that almost imperceptible lifting of the eyes, would have suspected what was going on in his mind, for we are all secretive creatures.

Chic felt ashamed of himself. When he had first visited that room it had been a tremendous experience; the thrill of it had almost suffocated him, and as he had held Queenie in his arms he kept saying to himself, "I adore

her, I want to marry her. She's the sweetest, loveliest girl in the world."

But now, as he looked into Charmian's eyes, and felt the pure exaltation of her presence, he knew he could never love any one else. Queenie appealed to him deeply, but not in the fine, spiritual way that Charmian did.

This strange, hidden struggle went on when he was with either of the two girls; the fierce, consuming desire he had to take Queenie into his arms, to kiss her, to fondle her, and then, when he next saw Charmian he felt the degrading cheapness of Queenie's appeal.

Other young men seemed to have no qualms over their quests—indeed, they boasted of them—but Chic could not rid himself of the feeling of uneasiness which dogged him. Now and then he felt a vague fear: "What if something should happen?" But he put it aside. No chance of that.

He had promised himself that he would never again go back to the apartment above the wax works; it was not the right and proper thing to do. But he would feel lonesome and again over him would come the yearning to see Queenie.

"I'll just go down and watch her on the wire, and then slip away," he would tell himself.

And there she would be outlined above him, flitting back and forth on the wire, swaying lightly as the band played softly and insinuatingly. The applause of the people would go up; now she was throwing kisses.

"I'll just walk home with her," he would say. And then, side by side, they would walk to her rooms. But that was yesterday, many yesterdays—

Charmian looked up as the car purred past the barnlike wax works.

"What a funny old place that is, with all those weird banners outside.

I didn't know such things existed any more. I'd think the movies would drive them out of business."

It was a shock to Chic to hear Charmian say that. Of course it was cheap looking from the outside, and the banners were weird, but still it was an interesting place. Look at all the people it drew each year. Look at the showmanship back of it.

To Chic, after living in Junction City, Coney Island was fascinating. The thrill of the crowds, the lights, the stir and throb and pulse of life—it never failed to move him. And now, as he contemplated Charmian, he felt a sense of disappointment. After all, she was *blasé*.

The car stopped in front of one of the minarets which help to make Coney Island such a fantastic, Arabian Nights city, and Chic leaped out. Charmian would think better of Coney Island when she saw a little more of it.

A very pleased, excited, walking-on-the-air Chic led the way toward Zimmerman's office. How different it was from what it had been six weeks before when he had come out. He remembered the heartsickness which had swept over him that day. Now he was returning as a conqueror.

A splendid picture, perhaps a mirage, floated before him. It was of a great top, with a flag flying from the peak; crowds of people were getting in, the top started to spin, shouts of laughter went up.

There was a patter of feet behind him, and Chic felt a pulling like a child at his coat tails.

"Say, hello there, can't you see a fella? Do you think you're Mr. Zimmerman himself? I want to ask you something."

It was Half Pint.

As Chic introduced the immaculate

little man to Charmian, Half Pint's heels came together as if he were going to deliver a military salute, the cigar came out of his mouth, and he removed his hat with the air of being presented to the Queen of England and the Empress of India.

"This here is what I want to see you about," said Half Pint when he got Chic aside. "I want to see if you can help me. Mr. Zimmerman's going to be let out of the Hawaiian Show, and I don't know what I'll do."

As Half Pint talked he no longer seemed a tiny, humorous doll. Things had not gone well with the entertainer; he had received "notice."

"I don't want to join a troupe," he declared with feeling. "And that's where he says he's going to send me."

This unexpected turn in Half Pint's life had been caused by Zimmerman, who had decided that Half Pint was no longer young and limber enough for dancing in the Hawaiian Show, and was relegating him to a troupe.

A "troupe" was a collection of half a dozen or more midgets who must hop around and entertain audiences like trained fleas. They were far down the social scale in the park and show world; troupe midgets. Many had misshapen legs and heads—unpleasant creatures to look at. Not the exquisite little dandy that Half Pint was. Sometimes they all appeared on the stage at once, running and scrambling and playing rough jokes like a band of clowns.

"I just can't join a troupe," he insisted earnestly.

It was as if Chic were talking to a child, quietly laughing at it, and then suddenly realized that its feelings and emotions were just as deep and genuine as his own.

"I've always been a single." And

in the midget's voice was a little cry. "I—I thought maybe you could help me out, Mr. Cotton."

Chic felt a liking for the comic, pathetic little creature that nature had played such a low trick on.

"I don't know, Half Pint, whether I can or not," he said. "I'll see."

"Well, so long, Mr. Cotton. Didn't mean to interrupt you."

His hat came off, he made a low bow, the cigar went back into his mouth, and he marched proudly past the crowd which had stopped to stare at him.

Chic experienced a warm glow as he realized how intensely Mr. De Ford had been watching the interruption. It showed what a person of consequence that he, Chic, was getting to be at Coney Island.

"Half Pint's a nice fellow," he declared as they walked on.

"I didn't know you knew so many people down here," said Charmian.

Chic felt a nervous flutter within him.

"Oh, sure," he declared disarmingly. "I met him when I was hanging around here studying my top."

Charmian's eyes went over him again with mild astonishment. Why, he had told her little or nothing about Coney Island. But they had arrived at the Dragon's Gorge, and now Chic was piloting them through the side door.

CHAPTER XX

QUEENIE ARRIVES INOPPORTUNELY



CHIC knew how it would be when they met at Mr. Zimmerman's office for the final decision. Hadn't he gone over it often enough?

Sitting before your bench all day,

you've got plenty of time to think.

Mr. Zimmerman would be at his desk in that queer, jumbled, crazy office of his, and then they'd walk in—Mr. De Ford and he. Mr. Zimmerman wouldn't be impressed, and then after they'd got the papers all signed up 'n' everything—signed on the little old dotted line—and it was all over, and they were havin' a chat, like business men do when they've settled some big deal, then Mr. Zimmerman, he'd put his hand on Chic's shoulder and say:

"Well, Cotton, pretty good for you. You stick to me and you'll wear diamonds."

It was a phrase his father, the dreamer and ne'er-do-well, had used, and Chic had always liked it. And now it popped into his head.

"Tell Mr. Zimmerman that Mr. De Ford and Mr. Cotton are waiting to see him," he said to the office girl as John D. Rockefeller might have said in his prime.

"He says you're to come in," she said after a moment's disappearance.

That was it. Big, important people like him and Mr. De Ford wouldn't have to cool their heels in an outer office. Why, it 'd probably been all right if they'd just knocked on the door and walked on in.

"Hello, Mr. Zimmerman," he called genially as the withered balloons bobbed and tugged and whispered at their strings.

But Mr. Zimmerman wasn't at his desk. He was at a long side table on a high stool, with his coat off and sleeves rolled up over his hairy arms.

Chic had the sense of seeing, as his eyes flashed over the table, a miniature village, such as one sees sometimes in a window display about Christmas time. And that, indeed, was what it

was. There it was all complete, with tiny, winding streets, houses no larger than pieces of gingerbread, little fairy trees. A sleigh no larger than a thimble was coming down the street.

On the wall were tacked the blue prints and drawings from which the tiny village had been made. Here and there on the drawings were details enlarged and worked out in flowing pencil sketches, as Zimmerman had matured and enriched his plans.

"Something for an amusement park that he's working on," thought Chic.

"Howdo," greeted Zimmerman briefly. "Have a seat." He waved his hand toward a settlement of chairs. "Be with you in just a minute."

And he bent over some detail. His pencil moved with surprising quickness for such a slow-spoken, deliberate man, and as he bent intently over it there was a slight, almost imperceptible, whistling as his breath came and went.

So far as Mr. Zimmerman was concerned his callers did not exist; the sketch growing under his pencil alone was of interest to him. But it lasted only a few moments, then he turned slowly on the stool, one foot at the end of a short thick leg touching the floor, the heel of the other hooked over a rung.

"I wish to introduce you to my daughter, Charmian," Mr. De Ford said with dignity. "Charmian, this is Mr. Zimmerman."

Zimmerman, in acknowledgment, made no effort to rise, nor did he offer to shake hands.

"Howdo, Miss De Ford. You folks 'll have to excuse me, you caught me up to my neck."

Chic was the only one who knew all of them, and now he felt that he must

give the meeting an air of geniality. He chattered to Mr. De Ford—wasn't it interesting to see behind the scenes? Wasn't it fascinating? His hand swept over the crazy jumble. Well, this was the place where the ideas for the big amusement devices were worked out—right here.

"Look at this," said Chic, turning to the half completed dragon on Mr. Zimmerman's desk. "I expect when this is grown up you'll see it in a park some day."

He gave a little nervous laugh in his eagerness to make the situation go off well.

"You don't have to do that," Zimmerman cut in. His eyes rested on Chic as a cat's might rest on a bird it was silently stalking.

There was a damper on Chic's spirits as he felt the silent, ominous power of the man. But now, at this time, when his whole future was in the balance, he must not show it.

The business talk began. Chic had expected to see Zimmerman impressed by the dignity and position of Mr. De Ford, but there was no such silent flattery on Zimmerman's part. So far as he was concerned, Mr. De Ford might have been a park follower trying to get a huckly-buck concession.

It was as if Mr. Zimmerman had said: "There's my proposition; you can take it or leave it." And in substance, this it was. Mr. De Ford had asked for concessions, for better prices, for more assurance as to when the top would be completed, whether or not Zimmerman would open it at Coney Island, the matter of foreign rights, but now, as the papers were drawn up, the proposition was as Zimmerman had laid it down in the first place. Work was to start at once.

"I don't know when would be the

best time to have an official showing," said Zimmerman. "We don't know what else might be on the market. I've seen a lot of men rush into this here game and wish they hadn't. When we get it built, we'll see about the opening. Do you know what percentage of rides make good? One out of twelve. So I don't want you tryin' to crowd me."

Chic saw the papers put before Zimmerman, saw him spread them out on the rough pine architect's table, saw Zimmerman rest his hairy arms on the table.

"I'll sign."

Chic heard the heavenly words. Zimmerman's fingers went to his vest pocket, out came a big, colored fountain pen, it poised, and then a surprisingly neat signature flowed from it.

Now it was done—the top was an assured thing, with the best man in America behind it!

Chic remembered news reel scenes he had witnessed, when some big contract had been signed and the dignitaries had all smilingly shaken hands.

"Say," he declared with silent jubilation, "don't you think we ought to shake hands on that, like they do in the movies?" and he gave a little laugh.

He made a motion toward Zimmerman, but Zimmerman's hand did not go out to meet his.

"You better wait till the end of the first season," the builder said.

In Zimmerman's vest pocket was a row of cigars, with the hard packed brown ends showing; he took one out and lit it. Then, as if remembering that Mr. De Ford was present, he hauled another of the deadly looking missiles from his pocket and poked it at him.

"Smoke?"

"No, thank you, not now."

Zimmerman turned to Chic.

"You?"

Chic smoked only cigarettes, but here was a chance to draw further into the good graces of the great park man.

"Yes, thank you, Mr. Zimmerman, I'd like to."

From Zimmerman's pocket came a gold lighter; he applied the flame and then passed it to Chic.

"May I ask what this is?" Mr. De Ford asked, after the cigars were going, indicating the miniature village spread the length of the table.

A slow smile moved across Zimmerman's face, like the sun breaking faintly through the shadows and creeping over the earth.

"That's a little fling I'm taking at the movies. I've always wanted to try my hand at them, and now I'm going to."

But in the simple words Mr. De Ford caught the eagerness and yearning which had been Zimmerman's for so long to take, as he said, his "fling at the movies." He was the most powerful man at Coney Island, and now the showman of him wanted very much indeed to graze in that rich field.

"I've designed it myself, and I'm going to build it myself."

As Zimmerman talked there was the absolute confidence he had in himself, that iron will which had risen up under endless adverse circumstances, and which knew not failure. He'd made a success of the park business, he'd make a success of the movies.

"How do you like it?" he asked. The hard, unyielding business man was gone; the artist spoke, the artist which never knows complete satisfaction.

"Very good, indeed," Mr. De Ford said sincerely. And in his voice was

the respect he had for the man who could conceive anything so simple and effective.

"I think the perspective is rather good," Zimmerman explained. "There is where I'm going to place the cameras," and he indicated a cross he had marked in the street. "You can see what it gives me?"

The others looked, and now that Zimmerman had pointed it out, observed the strategic effect.

"It took me some little time to work that out." Zimmerman hesitated a moment. "It's for Miss Queenie Johnson, my wire walker. I'm going to put her into the movies."

The room, to Chic, began to spin around. Zimmerman was going to put Queenie in the movies? So that was it! Astonishing, and yet why shouldn't it be? he asked himself at the same instant. The youth was jealous and uneasy.

Those nights in the rooms over the Wax Works—what if Zimmerman should find out about them? For a moment Chic felt a fierce, nervous beating of his heart, then it was gone. There was no danger; Zimmerman would never find out.

"Oh, are you?" he heard himself exclaim, seemingly before the words were out of Zimmerman's mouth. "Well, that's nice."

Slowly Zimmerman turned and his eyes moved over the youth. There was a sound of footsteps outside; abruptly the door was thrown open, Queenie was in the room. Chic's heart practically leaped out.

Holy cats! Why in the world did she have to come here! Didn't that beat two roosters fighting! The very thing he had not wanted had happened. He had told himself the two girls must never meet, and now

Queenie had popped up like a cork under water.

CHAPTER XXI

QUEENIE AND CHARMIAN

"H!" Queenie exclaimed at sight of the visitors, and turned as if to retreat. And then her eye encompassed Chic.

"Hello, there," she said, now feeling more at ease. "I remember, this is the big day!"

Her hand made a gesture at the model of the top on Zimmerman's desk.

Chic *felt* rather than saw the look that Charmian gave him. Who was this girl that had such an easy, off-hand manner with him? Why had he never spoken of her?

Now Zimmerman was introducing them. And he did it in his own way, without rising from his high stool.

"This is Mr. De Ford," he said with a gesture over his shoulder, "and his daughter—Miss Johnson." His voice softened and he turned to her proudly. "This is the little lady it's all for."

His hand made a short, abrupt gesture at the village on the table.

"Pleased to meet you," said Queenie in a way formal for her.

"How are you?" returned Charmian. "We were just looking at the model for the movie set. I think it's very good, indeed."

"Do you?" and in that instant Queenie flashed appraising eyes over Charmian. Who was this girl? What did she want? "I think it'll work out all right," she finished coolly.

"I do, too," declared Chic, filled with a sudden desire to talk. "Yes, I'm sure it will. Look at that fine per-

spective; that hill effect in the background."

They were the points that Zimmerman had called attention to, but now in the emotion of the moment he seemed to have discovered them for himself.

"I'll bet you you'll get away with pictures, too," Chic continued, addressing Queenie.

He turned to Mr. De Ford and Charmian.

"Miss Johnson is Coney Island's sweetheart, that's what they call her. There she is," and he indicated the poster.

The youth knew he was talking too much, but he could not stop. It was like an experience he had had when he was a boy in Junction City. He had prankishly caught hold of a train pulling out of the depot, and as it gained speed he was afraid to let go and afraid to hold on.

Miss Johnson was fine on the wire, he continued, yes, really wonderful. She'd make good in pictures, too.

"I'm sure she will," said Charmian.

But Chic caught the note of coldness in Charmian's voice.

"Thanks, Miss—I don't believe I quite got the name," Queenie responded.

"De Ford. Miss De Ford."

Chic's eyes flashed over them as they spoke, and now, more plainly than ever, he sensed the difference between them. Charmian—tall, dark, self-possessed; a "stunning girl" would be the accepted phrase to apply to her. In her steady gaze was to be seen a hint of the depth of her character; the advantages she had had in travel and education and world contact.

Queenie, on the other hand, was smaller, a flaxen, doll-like girl, and yet not a doll at all, for she was well mus-

pled, healthy, alive and vital. She was garbed in unusually bright colors, and this was what she liked.

As they stood side by side, and the little group talked during the final signing of the papers, Chic recognized Charmian's superiority over Queenie. He felt in some obscure way that he must bring them together.

"Miss De Ford is a radio singer," he explained eagerly. "Maybe you've heard her?"

But Queenie hadn't.

"I don't think so," she said. "I'm afraid not."

Now that Queenie was in the room, Zimmerman forgot the others.

"Look at this here, Queenie," he said. "Look what I have worked out."

He was bending over the table at Queenie's side and unconsciously he rested his hand on hers.

"Do you like it?" he asked appealingly.

"Sure," said Queenie.

At this moment the door was thrown open and Chic had the sense of seeing a humorous, exaggerated South Sea Islands animated doll rush in.

It was Half Pint, but not the immaculate little dandy he had met outside. The midget was in brown tights. His face had been given a coat of tan, around his ankles were humorous clown cuffs, in his ears dangled huge brass rings, and on his head was a fantastic silk hat.

However extravagant and burlesque might be the midget's dress, he himself was in no burlesque mood. He had gone to do his turn in the Hawaiian Show, but as he had played the ukelele and sung and danced his mimic dance, he had brooded on what Zimmerman had said. To go into a midget troupe—the ignominy of it! There was a saying in the midget world, "Once in

a troupe, always in a troupe"—no, he would not do it.

And now, his turn over, the little excitable man had rushed in, with his make-up still on, to plead with the boss to keep him as a "single."

"Pardon me," he piped. "I want to see you, Mr. Zimmerman. Listen, Mr. Zimmerman, please don't troupe me. That's what I wanted to see you about, Mr. Zimmerman."

In his eagerness the midget's hand, stained to represent a Hawaiian brown, seized Zimmerman's big hairy paw.

"I'm getting more laughs now than I ever did, and I'm dancing better, too. My hula it knocks them every time; you ask any of 'em. You just do that. I'm not getting too old, Mr. Zimmerman."

The absorbed, intense, almost crying little man now seemed to see the others for the first time. He straightened up, a surprising dignity came to his childish figure, his heels came together, off came the silk hat and he bowed low.

"I—I didn't mean to butt in," he repeated. "Please, Mr. Zimmerman, you won't do it, will you?"

Zimmerman's thick, powerful hand moved slightly.

"I don't recall sending for you," he said with slow, ominous calmness.

"Maybe I forgot. Did I?"

"N-no, sir."

"Well?"

"I had to come, Mr. Zimmerman. I—I just couldn't stand for you to troupe me, Mr. Zimmerman."

But now the little man's self-confidence was gone; he spoke in a broken, heart-sinking tone.

"What are you going to do about it?"

Half Pint's childlike fingers moved

helplessly. "I can't do anything about it. You know that," he appealed.

"I was going to send you in a couple of weeks, wasn't I?"

"Yes, sir," Half Pint returned eagerly, sudden relief in his face.

"Well, I've changed my mind, Half Pint"—there was a grating harshness in his voice—"you're going to-night. Take off that grass and turn in your tights to-night."

The pathetic little figure stood hesitating, his mouth moving silently like a fish too long from water, while his brown fingers, with their white, glistening manicured nails, opened and shut expressively. He started to speak.

"You heard me, didn't you?" Zimmerman demanded, and there was another movement of his powerful hand.

"Yes, sir."

The harshness and cruelty of it stirred Chic.

"That's not fair, Mr. Zimmerman," he protested, "and I don't think you ought to do it."

Slowly Zimmerman wheeled. His eyes moved over Chic with a strange, devastating calmness.

"You don't think so, eh?"

"No, sir, I don't."

"I don't recall asking what you thought on the subject." There was a moment's pause. "Did I?"

Chic moved uneasily. "No, sir."

The two men faced each other, looking silently into each other's eyes. From Zimmerman's mouth a cloud of smoke shot forth, whirling in Chic's face. And then, slowly and calmly, Zimmerman's eyes moved back to Half Pint, who was nervously revolving his hat in his hand.

"Are you planning on staying in here much longer?"

The little figure started slowly toward the door. Then he remembered

the others, his back straightened proudly, the rusty silk hat went back on his head, the door closed, the midget was gone.

Without a word or gesture Zimmerman turned back to the table, and unconcernedly resumed the conversation where it had been broken off. No, he wouldn't make any promises about the top; anybody who did 'd be a fool; in the park business no one ever knew which way the cat would jump.

As they had talked, Chic had taken his cigar out of his mouth and had laid it on the table with the edge projecting safely over, but the cigar had been pushed back, and now a wisp of smoke went curling and twisting up.

Part of the cardboard and paper which went to make up the village had begun to smoke, and as Chic saw it a cold fear seized him—what if the village should catch fire and burn up? And then the office? Fire in the concessions quarters constantly haunted the Coney Island showmen; once or twice it had swept through the wood and plaster buildings and had left havoc behind.

So, his heart threshing within him, Chic leaped at the tiny blaze. Before he could reach it, the usually slow-moving Zimmerman had struck with astonishing rapidity and beaten out the fire with his bare hand.

Now, with the fire out, he paused, glared at Chic, and then back at the cigar. Just as Chic reached for the cigar, Zimmerman's hand went out with a quick, spiteful movement, hurling it to the floor. Then he put his foot on it and ground it to pieces.

Chic, for a moment astonished, was all apologies; he should have been more careful.

"I—I don't know how I came to do it," he stammered.

It was time to go; the papers had been signed. Now they were leaving; there was a chorus of farewells.

"Good-by, Mr. Zimmerman," said Chic.

"G'day."

As they went outside, Chic experienced a sense of floating. He had entered Zimmerman's office in doubt—something might happen, Zimmerman might turn it down, but the man had signed.

Chic took Charmian's arm; the three of them started for the car. The scenes seemed very gay indeed. A boat was coming down the shoot-the-chutes with a shrieking load of human beings; a roller coaster flashed by; the weird, haunting sounds of singing and dancing floated out from the Hawaiian show; a shrill, childish treble rose—Half Pint was singing.

But there was one thing Chic did not see. After they had gone outside, Queenie had followed them to the door and now stood silently watching them.

CHAPTER XXII

BETROTHAL AND PANIC

MIGHTY nice when you have a girl you're in love with, and an invention that's going to make you rich. Sit and think about them till they sort of whirl around in your head and you get so happy it just pretty near lifts you off your feet.

Go to the factory, work along, thinking and dreaming, and now it's noon. Go out to armchair lunch, imagine about how it'll be when you're rich and won't have to sit on packing boxes.

Visit her fine Floral Gardens home. Go out with her in her car, get some nice fashionable golf clothes, play golf

with her, walk along the course with her, with the sun shining overhead and the green grass shimmering before you. Laugh, tell a funny story, look into her eyes, touch her hand, not much, just a little whisk. Most wonderful place in the world, New York is!

But everything wasn't heaven. There was Queenie. She was a nice girl, too; very nice, indeed, but—There was always that "but."

The romance of it held him; a tight-wire walker, advertised everywhere, Coney Island's sweetheart, people cheering her. If only he had known her during his lonesome days in New York, it would have seemed wonderful. Her good looks, her bright, attractive, tantalizing blondness, her perfect figure!

Now and then he felt an almost irresistible desire to go to see her again. Just to talk to her a bit. That was all. But he put it aside; it wouldn't be right.

Mustn't see Queenie again on account of Mr. Zimmerman. Mr. Zimmerman was doing too much for her, spending a ton of money on her putting her into the movies; must be in love with her. But it didn't seem possible—look how old he was! Nearly forty. Still, sometimes old men did queer things. All right; he himself wouldn't see Queenie again, except for a howdy-do, or something. That was all.

He thought of the strange friends he had made at Coney Island, and of the weird, bizarre life they led—Half Pint, Mme. Murta, Elfa, the Natural Albino, Yatsomoto; the barkers, mentalists, dancers, jugglers, scene painters, grifters—what a fascinating crew they were!

Then he thought of Mr. and Mrs.

De Ford—well to do, conservative—and their rich, prosperous friends; their dinners, their bridge clubs, their big cars, their speed boats—what a different world they lived in! It was kind of nice to know two such different worlds.

One day he went to Coney to see Mr. Zimmerman, and just as he was getting on the subway to return, Queenie got off the same train. When the girl spied Chic she ran toward the car as if she wanted to speak to him, but it was too late. The train was gone.

As it sped away, Chic recalled the strange look on her face. What did it mean? Of course it was rough on Queenie, the way he had deserted her, especially after she had introduced him to Mr. Zimmerman and everything—but now that he was in love with Charmian he couldn't do anything else. It wouldn't be fair to Charmian.

Pretty cheap it was, after all, the way he had acted. But he would never do it again. The affair with the wire walker was all over. Queenie would go her way; he would go his. That would end it.

Chic continued to see Charmian, and love ripened. It seemed ages ago that they had met in Junction City, since the day they had gone for a ride into the country in the autumn, when the stiff hulls of the hazelnuts were beginning to turn back; strange he should remember that.

When he thought back on the time since he had arrived in New York, since that first exquisite view of the skyscrapers from the ferry boat, little or nothing seemed to have happened. Why, sometimes it had actually been monotonous; for days and days nothing had happened, not a blessed thing.

And then he would think of things that had taken place and he would realize that life was flowing along.

He visualized the little procession of events. The catastrophe at the golf club dance. The night he had been caught on the fire escape peering in at the dancing girls; pretty cheap that was; would he do it now? he wondered. His first meeting with Queenie; his taking her to a night club. The freaks' party over the wax works. His meeting with Mr. Zimmerman; the signing of the contract; now the Giant Top was being built.

Maybe that was what life was—just a lot of little things happening; at last you get old and then some day—but he didn't like to think of that.

At this time Charmian was to appear over the radio on her first network. She had been well received in her radio appearances and was to be given this chance. Her songs had made a deep impression on Chic, as he had sat in his lonely room, intent upon the tiny trickle of sound that beat so magically in his ears; and now it had been arranged that he should go to her house, there would be an early dinner, then he would accompany her to the broadcasting studio and wait while she sang.

Never had Charmian seemed so fascinating as when she sat that evening at the table, in the soft, mellow dinner lights, stirred and animated by the fact that she was soon to sing to a million people.

Behind her the butler came and went as quietly as an Indian in the depths of a forest, but Chic was no longer ill at ease as he had been the first time he had dined at the De Ford home.

Chic had a command of himself which he had not had when he first arrived in New York. Not only had he

come to the De Fords', but he had been invited to other homes where luxury and refinement were taken for granted. He was, indeed, mentally growing up; doing what thousands of young men and women do who come each year from the crossroads to New York, and find themselves in a new environment.

An incident happened that evening as they sped along in Charmian's roadster on the way to the broadcasting studio. Just a small thing.

"Chic, I want to ask you something," she said as the road flew under them like a conveyor belt. "It's about that tight-rope walker at Coney Island. When you went to sign the contract that day, and she came into the room, she seemed to know you so well. Does she?"

Suddenly there was a clamor in Chic's heart, and he felt a nervous perspiration.

"Why, I hardly know her at all," he declared, for now, with the car racing so softly along in the glorious twilight, Coney Island seemed a far and remote world.

He felt a moment's contempt with himself for the lie, but so quickly had come the answer that it was almost as if he did not have to think at all. He had simply opened his mouth and the words were there.

"It's just the same as true," he assured himself. "I'll never see her again."

"But she spoke to you so naturally."

"It's the way all that bunch do. It's the way in the theater, too, you know. It's a wonder she didn't call me by my first name."

"You're sure you don't, Chic?"

"Of course I am. I wouldn't tell you a lie, you know that," he heard himself say.

"I knew you wouldn't, Chic," she said, her voice suddenly soft and yearning. "I really knew it all the time, but—I don't know how to explain it—the thought has kept coming back to me ever since that day. I suppose it's feminine nature, or something. I just wanted you to tell me with your own lips, darling."

His heart leaped. Darling! It was the first time she had ever called him that, and he felt an immense, almost overwhelming tenderness toward her. What a sweet, noble girl she was! Queenie seemed cheap and shoddy in comparison.

Queenie was all right; nobody had a better heart, 'd do anything for a person, but her slang, her rough-and-tumble ways; sometimes she chewed gum. And now for a moment, as the car sped down Fifth Avenue, they seemed hardly to belong to the same world.

"Here we are," Charmian said lightly, as she drew the car into a side street. "Last stop, all out that's getting out."

For a moment her hand rested lightly on his, and her smile warmed his heart.

"I knew it all the time," she repeated. "I just wanted you to tell me."

Chic was amazed at the elaborateness of the studios, after they had been delivered from the black and gold elevators, and were on the floor devoted to broadcasting.

He saw the people coming and going, the hustle and air of excitement. A negro in a Mexican general's uniform whisked him out of his coat and then it was checked as if he were going to a Presidential reception. A page appeared in a uniform of at least a colonel, and took a piece of paper,

seemingly about the size of a postage stamp, and carried it off as if it were the pact of Paris.

Other pages appeared, other messengers, haughty lord chamberlains swept through the office on mysterious errands of their own, looking neither to the right nor to the left. He and Charmian might as well have been newsboys looking through the window at some great feast.

Miraculously all was changed. The reception girl had returned. Charmian gave her name in, the girl verified it from a printed list, took up the telephone, spoke in a few soft words; a door opened and a dignitary from the program department swept out, and now Charmian and her guest were great and honored personages. Nothing was too good for them.

Chic began to feel more and more important, and to him Charmian was increasingly wonderful. Here, indeed, she was a person of consequence. As an *artiste* ready to broadcast, she took on a fresh romance and glamour. And to think not ten minutes ago she had called him "darling"! This lovely, exquisite creature!

The announcer, in evening clothes, bore them away as if this were an event he had long looked forward to. He escorted them into a great reception room, with deep, spongy rugs on the floor, impressive oil paintings with little yellow title tags were on the walls, while a loud-speaker seemed to be playing softly and graciously for their own special benefit. Occupying a place by itself was an electric wall clock, plainly put there for this very occasion.

The announcer sat on the great sofa, his long black legs spread out, calmly talking, while the big electric clock on the wall whirred noiselessly on.

Chic felt tense with excitement. What if something should happen and Charmian should fail? Didn't the announcer recognize that in a few minutes, in a few seconds, Charmian would be in front of the microphone and half a million people—a million—might be listening to her? But the announcer sat there as if eternity were before him.

"Ready now," he said.

After all, his eye had been on the clock.

"May I take Mr. Cotton with me?" Charmian asked.

It wasn't usually done, might distract the *artiste*, but he guessed it could be done this time.

Chic caught sight of a glass-covered slot in the wall, behind which a man was sitting before a panel of switches and connections. Beyond him, through an open door, Chic could see rheostats, clock-faced dials, shaded lights, and a cobweb of coils and wires.

How he would like to go in there and examine everything, spend a day, but the announcer was unconcernedly marching on.

Another door opened—the studio itself—and Chic had the feeling of entering a room which was like a stage of a theater and yet which was half auction room. In a corner was a grand piano, funereal chairs were scattered about; there were music racks, instrument cases with their mouths open and yawning, and a blackboard on an easel with a list of rehearsals chalked on it.

And there, standing slenderly and unimportantly in a corner of the room, was the reason for it all—the "mike." Hardly worth noticing, it seemed, in the jumbly hodge-podge around it.

Chic took a seat on one of the funereal chairs, heard the accompanist

giving preparatory twiddles. Charmian was standing in front of the slender microphone. She gave Chic a smile—*click* said a little switch; now the announcer, paper in hand, was reading something or other.

Charmian bends slightly forward, the stubby hands of the accompanist come down, Charmian's voice rises.

Chic sat entranced, marveling at how calm and assured Charmian could be while he seemed to be lifted from vat to vat alternately of cold and hot water.

Through the glass panel he could see shadowy, mysterious figures making dumb signs to the announcer. Yes, she was going over O. K.

Chic's respect for the genius began to go up and up. What in the world did she see in a clothopper like him?

"I love her, I love her!" a silent, ecstatic refrain kept repeating. And now, as she stood before the slender little bronze pedestal, so serene, so poised, she appeared far, far above him.

At last she finished. The announcer leaped forward.

"You have just been listening to Miss Charmian De Ford—"

And now, with Charmian at his side, Chic floated into the reception room and their feet again trod on the spongy rugs.

"Charmian, I think it was just lovely—yes, it was," he repeated. "You'll get great notices. Listen, darling"—oh, wonderful word!—"I just think an awful lot of you."

Kind of mixed up, not a fine speech at all, but after the first few words had forced their way out, he was able to talk more connectedly. He was a different person from the incoherent gabbler who had first seen her in New York. These months had done much

for him; "better balanced" was one phrase for it.

As Chic and Charmian escaped, the Mexican general produced Chic's coat and helped him on with it. Chic fumbled in his pocket—a quarter—what difference did it make to-night? Oh, sweet, lovely, heavenly night!

The elevator opened, a cap poked itself out; *grrr*, said the doors; they were going down. Now they were out on the sidewalk. And then it was that he asked her to marry him.

"Yes," she replied softly.

For a moment Chic seemed to feel nothing at all. He had heard her, she had said yes, but it was all so simple, so natural, that he hardly realized the tremendous thing which had happened.

The street flowed under them, when they were again in her car; colored lights went on and off, phantom cars approached from side streets, flitted by, disappeared, while before him on the wheel, now and then turning slightly, were Charmian's ivory hands.

And because they were alone together, a sudden shyness came over him. In some way that he could not quite understand, what had happened was too precious for words.

But never had he been so conscious of her presence.

They talked about something or other, kind of hard to remember what.

Once he said: "Look, there's a policeman with a beard."

"So there is."

Now she turned into his street, the car slowed down before the curving stone steps.

"Good night, darling," he said, now suddenly bold.

"Good night, dear."

And then bending forward he kissed her, simply and naturally. Oh, the sweet ecstasy of it! He stood, as the

car rolled down the street, looking after her. He wanted to run after her, to stop her, and to explain over and over again how much he loved her.

He felt disgust for himself. Why had he ridden all the way uptown and said not another word about love? And now that she was gone it was the thing he wished to talk of most of all. Why had he spoken about the policeman with a beard? He had seen him before, directing traffic; it wasn't anything unusual, and yet that was the thing he'd mentioned instead of how much he worshiped her. What an idiot she must think him!

Engaged to lovely Charmian! It was the most perfect and wonderful thing in all the world!

He walked up the wide, curving steps, put his key in the lock, *click* it went, and started up the soggy stairs. But it hardly seemed necessary to walk at all; it was as if he had merely to wish and in some miraculous way he arrived at the place he wished to go. He fished another key from his pocket, and poked it into a dim, grating shadow.

Something touched his foot, or rather his foot touched something, and there, lying on the floor like a white ghostly shadow, was a piece of paper. No, not a piece of paper. An envelope. Why in sam patch should there be a letter under his door at this time of night? Strange.

He turned on the light. Fat little envelope. "For Mr. Cotton," was written on it. Then down in the left-hand corner, "Personal."

Suddenly Chic felt a devastating weakness in his knees. It was from Queenie, *but what could Queenie be writing him about?* And then coming and putting it under the door? His landlady always unlocked the door,

when she delivered a letter, and pitched it on the bureau.

He tore it open, and his eyes flashed to the bottom. Yes, there was Queenie's name.

Standing at the foot of the pock-marked bed, his hat still on, he read it:

CHIC DEAR:

I have been trying to get you on the phone. I must see you at once.

QUEENIE.

Beneath the word "must" were three underlines.

Chic sat down, with the letter in his hand, dumbly staring into space.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE HIBERNATING BEAR



IDN'T that beat cats a fightin'? Dang it, just as everything got to running smoothly this had to go and happen!

"Maybe she wants to see you about some business matter," a nice, friendly little voice suggested.

"You know she doesn't," a mean, disagreeable voice said.

He'd go and see her, but he just couldn't love her any more. There must be some escape without hurting her feelings.

"Of course there is," said the nice, friendly little voice.

Maybe it was something important about the top, something he ought to know.

He'd run out to see Queenie, have a good chin with her, and that 'd end anything personal. He'd tell her about Charmian, show her Charmian's picture and make her understand that it was all over between them. Queenie was a sensible girl. Even though girls *did* act funny sometimes, they had sense. Especially girls like Queenie.

It wasn't as bad as he expected, when he called up over the phone to set a time to go to Coney Island to see her. She didn't seem worried, especially. On the contrary, her voice seemed cheerful. She even laughed once. She'd probably got lonesome, living out there at Coney Island by herself in the winter time, and just wanted to talk to somebody.

But suppose something were wrong about his top? A shudder went over him; he felt a sinking sensation.

The time set to see her was six.

Chic, from the subway train, elevated on its steel stilts as it makes its great loop, looked out across Coney Island. But it was not the same Coney he had seen when he had first visited it, for it was winter. November.

Coney Island is a bear, and once a year it goes into its long hibernation. The wavy, skeletal outlines of the roller coaster were still there, the towers and minarets were there, but now they no longer danced and glittered and glowed; they were merely dull, grotesque absurdities poking at the clouds.

The great windmills no longer turned, the huge, fascinating electric eyes no longer winked, the thunder of the roller coaster was stilled, there was no sharp staccato from the shooting galleries, no candy machines turned endlessly and monotonously.

Where a million lights had glowed there were now a million ugly eyeless sockets, as if the bear had not only gone into hibernation, but had gaping, hollow cups where once bright eyes had danced.

Chic started down Surf Avenue, which in summer had been such a beehive, but now was forlorn and depopulated. A few faithful followers still moved up and down it, but they were

only memories of other days. Here had been the concessions and chance games with their "grift," "slum," "flash"; here had been the "grind stores," the racket game, the nail drives, the cat games, the pitch-till-you-win.

Those dull, gray, wooden shutters had been the gay entrance to a whoop-la game in which pink bisque dolls, celluloid alarm clocks and enormous field glasses were yours if you would merely toss a few rings over a plaster man and lady tangoing.

The great banners inviting the people to come in and see the greatest collection of human freaks in the world, bar none, were now safely rolled up and put away for another season.

Padlocks were on the wax shows. Inside ghostly figures stood about in layers of canvas. Was it possible that this queer, absurd jumble was a beheading in old China? And those innocent looking figures were once the gruesome Hammer Murder?

Here once had been the gilded, clamorous merry-go-round—"a four abreaster," the manager had proudly called it—and his voice and manner had contained nothing but scorn for a carrousel which had only three horses or seats abreast. But now it was a gaunt skeleton; the bright, gay horses with their long wooden flowing manes had been carted away to some unknown stable, and the brass poles which had made them gallop so daringly were covered with coatings of grease, and where the mechanical orchestra had served so well was now a gaping wound.

A watchman with a little brass clock on his hip moves like a wraith through Steeplechase. He pauses, hesitates—does he see something? Maybe he hears the ghost laughter of the once

gay crowds which swarmed in and out. But no, nothing so eerie, for the clock comes off his hip, a key is fitted and away off in some hall of records a little line appears on a revolving paper that society may know that it has been properly served.

Chic paused in front of a dingy old building. Was it possible that this had once been the gay, alluring front of the Little Egypt "cooch show"?

Here he had stood, on his first trip to Coney Island, and stared into the faces of the dancing girls and wondered what they could be like. He could still envision the "talker" out in front, with a huge cowboy hat on his head, urging the people to pack in closer while he told about the marvelous little girls straight from the harem and how they could control every muscle ab-so-lute-ly in their bodies. "It makes young men old and old men young."

Suddenly before him in the street Chic had the sense of seeing a car in a circus parade, so resplendent and glittering was the automobile. With the same instantaneous flash he knew that it was Zimmerman.

It was indeed a showman's car. The chauffeur wore livery with a cap richly laden with gold braid, although chauffeur's caps usually are chosen for their quiet, unobtrusive modesty. But what other people might select for their chauffeurs was of no consequence to Zimmerman. He liked gold braid. He put it on. Plenty of it.

At first glance the turnout was almost regal, but this idea was soon dissipated, for from the radiator cap floated a triangular flag, and as the car rushed along the flag streamed out and said "Coney Island."

The colored sun helmet which Zimmerman wore in the summer was gone.

In its place was a velour hat of pronounced color, and on his hands were bright, cream-colored, suede gloves, with the wrist parts turned back over his hands.

Deep in him was the desire to attract attention, to have people talk about him. When he went into a hotel lobby, in his pronounced and exaggerated clothes, he liked to have the loungers look up and wonder who he was; if somebody whispered, "That's Zimmerman, the King of Coney Island," he was happy; but not the slightest hint or suggestion would he give that he had heard.

An older man, more experienced in the ways of the world, would have attached significance to Zimmerman's interest in Queenie. But to Chic it was vague and far away, like a dream; Mr. Zimmerman was her employer, he patted her hand, he was putting her in the movies, but it was to make money out of her. Besides, he was too old for her.

And yet, in a way he could not quite explain, a feeling of self-consciousness came over Chic when he was in the presence of that silent, watchful man.

Strange this was, too, because Zimmerman was the one man in the world that he should be able to talk to freely and easily; Mr. Zimmerman was promoting his invention, he had accepted his money, their fortunes were linked together.

The big boss saw Chic. A hand went out, it picked up the speaking tube, the car drew over to the curbing. The gloved hand moved again, a window came down.

"Hello, how are you, Mr. Zimmerman?" said Chic, wishing to be affable. "Well, this is quite a surprise, isn't it?"

"Were you looking for me?"

Should he tell Mr. Zimmerman that he had come to see Queenie? It would be perfectly all right. Queenie was only his employee, that was all. And yet instinct warned him not to tell.

"No, sir, I just came down to look around, y' know, to see what Coney's like in the winter time. Lots different now, isn't it?"

His hand swept down deserted Surf Avenue.

"It really ought to be developed into a year round place," he continued.

He had heard Zimmerman say this very thing, and now suddenly the idea leaped into his mind.

"Like Atlantic City," Chic went on eagerly. "Look at how they pull them in down there through the winter. If you and some of the other big men here got behind it, I believe you could put it over."

As Chic talked men passing along the street made signs of greeting to Zimmerman, anxious to be recognized by him—concessionaires, ride builders, real estate agents, property owners and others of the winter colony who stayed the year through. But they meant nothing to him. With a slight gesture of his hand he returned their greetings while his eyes rested silently on Chic.

"So you think it would make a good winter resort?"

"I'm sure it would, Mr. Zimmerman."

"You've given a lot of thought to it, have you?"

"What does he mean by that?" thought Chic desperately.

"Y-yes, some. I've heard you mention it, too," he defended.

"Going back to New York? I'll give you a lift."

"No, sir. I thought I'd take a look around first."

Chic stepped back, interview ended.

"Good-by, Mr. Zimmerman."

A cream-colored suède glove lifted slightly.

"Goo' day."

The car gave a little movement, the flag straightened out.

As Chic continued down the street the impression remained with him. Why had the big fellow invited him to ride to New York? Was he really going to New York? Chic had seen the man many times in his car, but never before had he been asked in with him.

Other magnates behind the scenes at Coney Island seemed to have their cars filled with people, laughing and talking, but Zimmerman always rode alone. Sometimes in the summer he would appear in an open car, which made an unusual sight among the uniformity of the other cars, and there he would sit, a stiff, lone, silent figure with his arms folded across his breast, colored straw helmet on his head.

"Maybe it's all right; maybe he's getting more friendly," suggested the little part of Chic's mind which liked to smooth things over.

Chic continued on down the street, again lost in the changed conditions about him. Coney Island had, in its own words, "folded." The little world of performers, grinders, grifters, clowns, barkers and concessionaires had disappeared.

During the summer they had been like leaves on a tree, all together, all one big family, and then winter had come and touched them with its icy hand. A few determined ones had hung on grimly, as if saying, "No, I won't go; this is my home," and then the hand had moved across them again, and one by one they had let loose, some going in one direction, some in another.

Mme. Murta, the Hungarian Bearded Lady, had gone back for a visit in Budapest; the Natural Albino was cleaning windows; Half Pint had had a piece of luck and was now sitting pretty at Huber's Museum off Broadway; the Skeleton Dude had signed with a carnival and was now filling a string of fair dates; Jolly Irma, the Fat Girl, had gone for a try out in a musical comedy, which, if luck was with it, might get to Broadway; Louie Goltz, high stilt walker, was now marching up and down Clark Street, Chicago, in his long-legged policeman's uniform, for a cut rate tire agency; Sammie Blitzer had stored his cat game and was now a pitchman working factories in Detroit; Solly Hoheiser, king of weight guessers, had put his chairs in the express office and was driving down to Florida in his new Chevrolet; Doc Huffman, who had had the first box in the Fun House, had gone to Montreal to try his luck with an ice carnival; Terry, the Tattoo Artist, was now a helper in the Brooklyn Navy Yard; Larry-Laura, the half-man, half-woman, was helping his brother-in-law install a swimming pool in Jacksonville; Pa and Ma Wilkes were raking in the shekels with a Deep Sea Show in Texas.

Yes, Coney Island—that is, the human part—had “folded”—but spring would come again.

Suddenly Chic saw Yatsomato coming toward him along the deserted sidewalk. Yatsomato was the proprietor of a Japanese ball game, and all summer he stood quietly and impassively behind his counter offering the balls to passers-by, but in the winter he worked in a Japanese gift shop in Brooklyn, and saved his money. Some day he would have a gift shop of his own, and if Chic knew anything about

him it would be a very nice and successful one.

“Nice glame. Maybe like try, please,” he would say, and strangely enough more people tried their luck with him than with the shouters and counter pounders.

And now, as Yatsomato saw Chic, a smile lit up his face.

“H'llo,” he said, elaborately tipping his hat. “Nice supplise. Vlery cold now.”

At sight of this friendly soul, so different from the calculating Zimmerman, a rush of words came tumbling from Chic.

Yes, it was sure cold. “How are you, anyway, Yatsomato?”

“Big day to-day,” said Yatsomato. “Everybody come back. Mr. Zimmerman him just go by in car. Big flur coat.” Now his tone changed. “But him come all time now, see Missie Qlueenie.” His hands, pausing in their rubbing together, gave a little gesture. “Maybe goin' to marry Missie Qlueenie. Don't know. Vlery nice glirl. Well, glood-by, Mr. Cheec, go now,” he said, and again his hand went up to his hat.

And turning, the little man started down the street, his hands once more pushed into his overcoat pockets.

So Zimmerman was coming to see Queenie so often that even Yatsomato noticed it? Chic turned toward the Boardwalk. On the bench were the winter bathers, those curious, eccentric human beings who bathe all winter in the surf off Coney Island. Half a dozen of them were noisily playing leapfrog. Now and then they broke away, made brief plunges into the water and came galloping back again.

Nothing seemed to give them quite such a deep and satisfying pleasure as to stand there in their scanty suits

while the occasional paraders on the Boardwalk, wrapped in their furs, stopped to stare at them. And there they would be all winter, these people who in many ways seemed to be sane.

As Chic stood looking over the rail, the picture changed. It was summer time, and he again saw himself in the water with Queenie, when they had played beach ball and gone to Feltman's. How fascinating, how alluring she had been that day!

But no time to day dream. Must step along. Before him on the Boardwalk he could see in the twinkling dusk the outlines of the big, fashionable hotel. What would happen to him before he came out of it again?

CHAPTER XXIV

BREAKING THE NEWS GENTLY



CHIC: "I'd like to speak to Miss Queenie Johnson, please."

Hotel clerk: "You can call her up over one of those phones. Room—" and he gave the number.

Chic, at the phone: "Is that you, Queenie? Chic. I'm downstairs. I'll come up right away, if you want me to. How're you, anyway?"

That was the way to talk; don't show her you are worried. Much better than to be nervous about it. But he must be very gentle, very tender with her. She would be upset, naturally; maybe crying a little.

The elevator door opens, the elevator door shuts; *wssssh*, the elevator whistles gently, and a young man walks down the softly carpeted hall as if it were nothing at all.

Brrr, says the little ivory button; the door opens and there she is!

What a fascinating picture Queenie

makes with her bright, blond hair, her big blue eyes and the smile on her lips.

"Hello, kid," she greeted him.

"Hello, Queenie. You're looking good. How're you?"

Should he kiss her? No, that wouldn't be right. Of course not. He hesitated a moment, and then reached out his hand.

"Say, haven't you got something better than that?" she asked.

"I can't do that, because I'm engaged, and it's all over between us," he ought to explain, but he couldn't get the words out. Well, just this one time; the last. Quickly he bent toward her, their lips met—and he felt the pleasant strange stirring he always had for Queenie.

"That's more like old home week," declared Queenie.

Chic smiled weakly. He must not encourage her.

It was the first time he had ever been in her hotel room; its taste and sense of luxury impressed him. There were pleasant, glowing, friendly lights, a *chaise-longue*, deep chairs, a door opened off to a bathroom. But how she must have suffered from loneliness in this room, sitting here thinking, thinking!

"Well, how's the world been using you?" she asked as she extended an ornamental cigarette box. "Give it a push and it'll do the rest."

Chic put his thumb on a plunger and miraculously a cigarette was delivered to him. In a moment they were smoking.

"She doesn't seem to be taking it very hard," he thought. But never had he understood her. What a strange, mysterious girl she was! Always there was about her the feeling that he never knew what to expect.

"Have a cocktail?"

"Sure," returned Chic brightly.

From a neat side table Queenie brought glasses, a tray, bottles and concoctions appeared. And then, when all was prepared, she poured the fruits of her efforts into a silver shaker, and into this she put an electric mixer. She pushed a button; the shaker came to life and began to vibrate. Chic stared at the little demon in amazement, for it was the first he had ever seen.

But now he must talk, must fall in with her light, casual way, and not sit staring about him like a dummy at the wax works. Getting up, he stood before the quivering, humming little contraption, instantly interested in this thing of mechanics.

"Say, that's pretty scrumptious. Where'd you get it?"

"Mr. Zimmerman, he gave it to me."

Oh—ah—

"Here's mud in your eye!" said Queenie, lifting her glass when it was ready to serve.

"Same to you, and many of them."

That was the way to talk, but his heart gave a quick little jump. That was what folks said sometimes when they talked about babies. Keep away from the subject. Say, she had a nice place—a good view of the ocean.

He sat down twirling the delicate stem of the glass between his finger and thumb. How did she like her new movie work?

Oh, it was all right. Kind of interesting in lots of ways. Queenie sighed, a faint dissatisfaction showed in her voice. Yes, it was all right, but—well, she didn't know whether she was cut out for the films or not. Some of the early tests had seemed fairly good. Mr. Zimmerman thought they were wonderful.

"Put another on top of it," said

Queenie, and the silver cocktail shaker lightly kissed the edge of Chic's glass.

In Junction City Chic had rarely had a drink. In New York, now and then, he had imbibed something at parties, and also on the rare occasions when he had ventured into night clubs. Now, as he sat in the deep chair, he felt a pleasing, comfortable glow. The room took on an even more delicate pink, and suddenly he felt talkative.

"How'd you like to sit in front of some food?" asked Queenie.

Go down to the dining room and have dinner with her when he had come here to tell her that she must—No, he wouldn't do that. Any minute, now, Queenie would have to hear the bad news. He shivered slightly. What would she do? Suddenly he felt sorry for her; how little did she suspect!

"We'll slip the ol' feed bag on right here." She picked up the French telephone from its support. "Please send up a card."

A waiter came respectfully with the menu. It would be a great honor, indeed, to serve her, his manner said. And Queenie, in that careless, semi-humorous way of hers, leaned lazily back in the *chaise-longue* and went over the menu. Did the waiter have anything on the bill-of-fare to-day which he could conscientiously recommend?

He had, and he told about it with the enthusiasm of waiters looking to the future.

"Well, I don't think I'll take any of it, then," declared Queenie.

To Chic, now suffused by the rosy glow, it seemed very funny. And Queenie *was* funny, in that rough-and-tumble, devil-may-care way of hers. And yet she always managed to keep about her that air of mystery which Chic found fascinating.

Another waiter appeared, a table was cleared, a cloth was spread, and outside the door more ghostly menials appeared, whispered, consulted, tiptoed away again, and now dinner was served. The waiter bowed from the middle.

Did Miss Johnson like it?

"It looks all right from here," said Miss Johnson. She turned to Chic. "How'd you like to have something to wash it down with?"

"For instance?"

"Something right off the ship—the ship that comes from Brooklyn, New York."

"It sounds all right from here."

That was the way. Right back at her. After all, Queenie was awfully good company.

"Bring the bucket," said Queenie.

The waiter bowed at the belt, disappeared, and came back with a little stand on which a silver pail was mounted. Queenie unlocked a wardrobe trunk, and from its depths brought forth a bottle and handed it to the waiter.

"Put it where it belongs, Louie."

The waiter packed it away tenderly and lovingly, and closed the door as though on a pneumonia crisis. Now they were alone.

Queenie presided at the table; gleaming silver covers were lifted, little clouds of steam floated aloft, there was the soft clink of spoons.

"I won't say a word till we get through eating," he thought. "Then I'll tell her," he added sharply.

And now, as they ate, the room seemed even more charming; Queenie herself had never seemed so alluring. She smiled across at him.

"Do you like it here, kid?" she asked.

"Sure do. Awfully nice place."

She put her jeweled hand on his.

"Is that all that's nice?"

Chic hesitated.

"Well, you're nice, too," he said at last.

"Don't be one of those birds that the only way you can get a compliment out of them is with a can opener," she declared. "If you like people, why not tell them about it—that's what I think."

"Poor little girl!" Chic thought again. "In a few minutes she's got to know."

The waiter came now and lifted the bottle from its cool depth as a mother lifts a firstborn from its cradle, and wrapped it with a napkin. A corkscrew gleamed—*plop!* said the bottle, and then the waiter again crept into oblivion.

"Here's looking at you!" said Queenie, and held up her thin crystal cup.

"Happy days."

"I wish I could think so." Now she was looking into his eyes. "Maybe there will be," she said.

A sudden fear shot through Chic, and his heart went out to her. What an unspeakable, dam' fool he had been. That lovely girl!

But soon the cloud was gone, the look which had filled her eyes disappeared, and Queenie began to tell about her motion picture experiences. In a moment Chic was laughing. His hand reached out and patted hers. The girl grinned invitingly.

"Don't sweep me off my feet."

And now, as she smiled into his eyes, it did seem a feeble gesture.

The pleasant meal continued, the room grew more lovely; how agreeable it was to sit and listen to the nimble-witted Queenie! The waiter came, Houdini made a few motions, the table

disappeared, Queenie signed the check, the waiter stole out, the door closed.

And now, as they stood smoking, Queenie suddenly drew him down.

"Didn't you forget something?"

Then he felt her lips on his. That peculiar, half pleasant, half unpleasant, thrilling sensation passed over him. And in the second or two that he stood there a terrific warfare waged inside him.

What a low-down dog he was to do this—engaged to the sweetest, loveliest girl in the world, and then would come to see another girl, have dinner with her in her room, and now kiss her! If he had heard of some one else doing it he would write him down as a low-lived cad, and yet here he himself was actually doing it. Damned funny thing, life.

As Chic stood with his arms around her, the little doorbell sounded, and Chic's soul became a shriveled peanut.

"Damn it to hell, I'll bet I'm caught!" he said to himself with an instantaneousness that made electricity seem slow and fumbling.

Instantly Queenie was a few feet from him, standing seemingly as calm and poised as the Statue of Liberty.

"Come in."

The knob turned, and Elfa, the Elephant Skinned Girl, stood in the doorway.

Chic felt a trembling—what if it had been Zimmerman? Zimmerman! The name was beginning to come to him more and more. Gradually he felt a sense of guilt.

Behind Elfa was a pretty, brown-

haired girl of nine—her daughter. All the performers and personnel in the tight, gossipy little world behind the scenes at Coney Island knew about Elfa and her daughter, although none of them had ever seen her.



And yet he was engaged to another girl!

Elfa had been born in Iowa, the daughter of a village carpenter, a family respected in the community. At the age of six some strange, gray corrugations had begun to appear on the child. Her parents had taken her to the village doctor. "Maybe she will outgrow it," he had said. But she hadn't outgrown it. Instead, the gray waves had thickened. None, however, had appeared on her face or hands.

A report spread over the village that her mother had been frightened by an elephant before the child was born. The sensitive girl had become an object of curiosity in the village; people

had come to the house, the child must be hauled out and exhibited.

At last, after she was grown, an offer had come for her to go with a "side show." She had been shocked—what a terrible thing!

But it was a chance to help her father and mother, and so the word was given out that she had gone to New York to visit a cousin. And then the sensitive, frightened girl from Iowa had taken her place on the platform with the freaks, a lecturer had stepped up beside her, and the staring people had begun to file by.

After a time Elfa had married the man who ran the lung-testing machine, who, when this meal ticket fell into his lap, lost all interest in the capacity of people's lungs. Elfa had supported him for a while, then he had drifted away. There was to be a child, and sensitive Elfa had suffered agonies—suppose it should be marked, too?

But when the baby had been born it was normal and whole; a deep passion was aroused in Elfa that her child should never suffer the tortures she had gone through. She had decided to give it up and not be known as its mother. She had been able to get it into the Baby Incubator, and each day she had gone to see it lying in its sanitary glass cage. Later she had hired a nurse and had become the child's "aunt."

This was now the absorbing passion of her life—her daughter must never know that her mother was a freak.

To-day was the last time she would have Glenna this winter. After Coney Island had closed, Elfa had gone out to fill fair dates; the fairs were over, she would now return to her old home in Iowa while little Glenna remained in school.

Queenie had invited Elfa to stop by

the hotel and let her see Glenna. When brown-haired little Glenna made a curtsy, as she shook hands, Elfa's heart nearly burst. At this moment Glenna had on a dress which Elfa had painstakingly made as she had sat on the platform.

"Can you sing your little French song for Miss Johnson?" asked Elfa.

She leaned eagerly forward in her chair as Glenna made a bow and her childish treble rose, and as Chic sat there he caught something of what it meant to this sensitive freak from an Iowa village whose little girl could sing with such childish stirringness a French song.

Queenie's impersonal, *blasé* manner slipped from her as she spoke to Glenna. An unexpectedly gentle and appealing note was in her voice.

"That's lovely, Glenna darling, just lovely. I don't think I ever heard a little girl sing a French song before."

But by now Glenna was restless; she must "see the things," and wandered about the room exploring its mysteries, while Elfa sat talking, but her eyes never leaving the child. At last it was time to go.

"Say," said Queenie as they were going, "I want you two to go down to the dining room and eat on me. I got to stay here and talk to Chic, but I want you two to bust yourselves. Sign my name, and don't be no canary birds."

CHAPTER XXV

A PLAYTHING OF FATE



AS Elfa and Glenna went radiantly and happily out, Chic felt a wave of liking for Queenie. Tough? Yes, but how like her it was to make some one happy. What a splen-

did meal it would be for Elfa as she sat in the well-appointed dining room with no thought of expense, and with her daughter across the table from her.

"God! She's sure nuts about that kid," Queenie said as the elevator hummed away with its happy load. "I don't know what she'd do if anything 'd happen to Glenna. Gives me goose flesh to think about it."

Now that Elfa and Glenna were gone, Queenie grew grave and sober. Something was on her mind; Chic felt a strange uneasiness. The time had come.

"I must keep her from saying it," he told himself. "How are you getting along with your work?" he asked aloud.

Oh, she was getting along all right, except—well, for Mr. Zimmerman.

"He thinks he owns me," declared Queenie. "He's the most jealous hombre I ever knew."

"Jealous?" repeated Chic. "What's he jealous about?"

He was jealous on general principles, Queenie said. Curious man, Mr. Zimmerman was. People thought because he was in the show business and dressed sporty that he was a skirt chaser. But he wasn't at all. Lots of men in the park game were; a girl might just as well walk into a tiger cage as to meet up with some of them, but Mr. Zimmerman he wasn't that kind.

And indeed this was true. However "sporty" and out for what he could get Zimmerman might look, with his exaggerated clothes, it was only for the public. It was the showman in him. In reality, night life made no appeal to him, and girls not at all. That is, girls in general. He was, as Queenie said, "a one-woman man."

"Come over here and sit on this do-dad beside me," the girl invited, abruptly changing the subject. "I guess you wondered what the hell when you got my note, didn't you?"

"Naturally."

"Well, say, you don't have to be Marshal Foch stopping the Germans. Listen, kid, I got something to tell you."

He waited tensely.

"Listen, Chic darling," she said, "here's something right out of the Bible. I'm plumb crazy about you, and I have been ever since that night you peeped through the window from the fire escape. God! If that wasn't about the most hey-rube thing I ever saw, I don't what is. That's what I thought at first. But when we went out and danced and you were so simple and honest and boyish—well, it knocked me for a row of tent pegs."

It was pleasant to hear her say these things. As Chic sat in the cozy room, with the effect of the champagne singing in his veins, he began to see Queenie in a rosy light. There flashed before him the picture of her as he had seen her balanced so lightly on the wire, with the band softly playing; the picture faded, he was now dancing with her; he could feel her lithe body swaying under his hands.

"Of course," continued Queenie. "I know a girl is supposed to sit back and pretend she's not interested, and let the man chase her and all that, and I would, too—if it was any other man. But damn it! After all we've been through together, I don't see why I've got to let on that you don't mean any more to me than a throw-away handbill. That's why I sent you the note—I'm crazy about you, and I'm going to tell you so right to your face."

Her voice became soft and wistful.

"When you didn't come to see me any more—well, it knocked me for a loop. I tried not to pay any attention at first, tried to get all het up about this here movie racket, but I couldn't do it. And me—the way I used to be I wouldn't look at P. T. Barnum himself!—here I go gettin' down on my knees to you almost. The 'cold queen,' that's what they used to sometimes call me, and now—well, I don't care. Sometimes I'd lay awake half the night arguing with myself—that part got me a lot more than when I gave myself up to you. Queer, ain't it? But it's the way I'm made. Then Mr. Zimmerman gets to hanging around and spending money on me, and I don't know. Kid, I'm crazy about you—and I want to marry you."

For a moment Chic had the feeling that he had not heard rightly, and yet he knew that he had. Queenie wanted him to marry her! Of course he couldn't; what an absurd idea! Impossible! He had always heard that a girl shouldn't propose, but still it was often done.

"I ought to tell her about Charmian," a voice kept repeating to him. "Tell her. Why, this is terrible!"

But he could not quite bring himself to say it. After all, it was a pretty low thing to have made love to Queenie and then to jilt her. "And now you're trying to sneak out of it without paying," the voice said.

That was what his father had done. Gone off with a Chautauqua entertainer and ruined the life of his mother. And now, as he sat in the rose-hued room he thought: "My first duty is to Queenie. I'm going to do the square thing by her." He would go to Charmian and break off their engagement. Yes, that was it, go to her and break it off.

"Do you like me a little?" asked Queenie.

"Of course I do," he heard himself say. "I love you."

He continued to sit with his arms around her, now and then he kissed her. "What a sweet, darling girl," he thought. But now it was getting late, time to go. A good night kiss, now he was out on the Boardwalk in the sharp, lovely November night.

He paused and looked back at the hotel glowing in the moonlight. Why, up there was her room! Didn't that beat the sam patch? Engaged to two girls at once!

He turned his back and struck off across deserted, ghostly Coney Island in the direction of the subway.

CHAPTER XXVI

CHIC HAS TWO FIANCÉES



CHIC was amazed at what had happened. Engaged to two girls! It was hardly believable, and yet there it was, take it or leave it. Now what in the world would he do? A pretty mess he had stepped into.

And yet, in spite of everything, he felt proud of himself. It wasn't everybody who could get himself engaged to two such girls at the same time! Refined, cultivated, well-to-do Charmian, who sang over the radio, and who was studying to be a concert singer. A lovely person, indeed. Pretty, fascinating Queenie, with her lithe, supple, perfect body.

Chic liked to meditate over it all, liked to sit in a restaurant and look at some respectable, middle-aged person and think:

"Wouldn't he be surprised if he knew that I was engaged to two girls at once! He probably imagines I'm

just an ordinary, everyday sort of humdrum person, not different from anybody else. And here I am, quite a fellow!"

To him, with the seriousness with which youth looks at itself, it seemed that no other person in the world had ever become involved in such a tangle. Little did he realize that no doubt it had happened many times to other young men; probably at the moment in New York alone there were hundreds enmeshed in the same romantic net. But even had it occurred to him, it wouldn't have helped solve his own problems.

During this troubled time, if a cross-section of his mind could have been laid bare, it would probably have looked like this:

"Now what the deuce am I going to do? God! What a mess a fella can get himself into. Maybe there's some way to break out of it without hurting their feelings. Of course there is. Wonder why ol' Zimmerman is always looking at me? I'm going to keep on the good side of him, that's one thing sure. He's got all my money, but I'm going to get it back, and a lot more with it. The top's going to make me rich. Queenie's nice. Yeh. Pretty, and got plenty of pep. Awfully nice hair, nice blue eyes, and those red lips. Um! Why, Queenie's a lovely girl! Damned lucky to be engaged to her. Only—"

He'd go to Charmian and break it off. A poignant sorrow shot through him. How could he tell that lovely girl he didn't want to marry her? But he must.

The scene rose before him as it would be when he blundered through the fateful words—the sudden silence which would come to her, her lips slowly compressing and growing thin,

then the proud lift of her head. "Oh, it's quite all right. Quite all right." Then he would go stumbling away in the darkness.

He visited Coney Island a time or two after that to see Queenie; they went to dinner together, they danced together; very nice evenings, indeed. But when he returned to his room a strange restlessness laid hold of him. He couldn't sleep very well.

Too much noise, or something; people under him always throwing parties, then talking their heads off before they finally had sense enough to go to bed. Terrible place to live in. Move. That's what he'd do. Ought to, long before this, anyway.

Now and then he thought about Zimmerman. Strange how Zimmerman affected him. A person would naturally think, when you were practically in business with another man, that he'd kind of shine up to you; at least, talk things over now and then. Maybe ask you out to dinner, but not Zimmerman. Colder than ever. Hardly grunt, sometimes.

But Zimmerman didn't neglect the top. That was one thing. Top was getting along fine. When Chic went to the factory where it was going up, his heart leaped like a thousand daffodils. Fascinating it was to see it grow from an armload of blue prints into a hollow, skeletony, immense contraption. Like going to the movies and seeing one of those scientific pictures of the planting of a cutting and then watching the cutting sprout and turn into a lovely rose.

Chic liked to walk around in the factory where the steel work was being bolted into shape—his, actually his; his brain had conceived it—and watch it bud and blossom.

Only, Zimmerman acted so strange;

never chat, never say a word more than he had to. Sometimes just stand and look as he puffed at his big, black cigar. Then turn and walk away without a word.

But one day at the factory something happened. It was a matter of safety underfriction by which the cars, in event of an accident, could be stopped quickly and expeditiously without tossing the passengers into the surrounding park. The first of the brakes had been put into place, and Zimmerman was not satisfied. The difference was slight; any other builder would have passed it up. It would get by the Safety Code Committee, so why worry?

But in Zimmerman was a deep and profound respect for the Safety Code Committee and its rulings. In fact, he had been the founder of the Safety Code, which was a power in the National Association of Amusement Parks—the NAAP—and now the change must be made.

"We're not going to try to put anything over on the Safety Code Committee," declared Zimmerman. "We've got to build up the confidence of the public in amusement parks—don't take no chances, that's my motto."

For some moments he talked about the tenets of his belief. Many men in the park business cared nothing about the public; get the money, a new set of suckers is born every season; but this was no part of Zimmerman's attitude.

"Don't take no chance on an accident just because it means a little extra work," he said.

As Chic saw this fine trait in Zimmerman's character, he felt a sudden liking for the man. Other builders would have let it slide by—"It 'll probably be all right." Not so with Zimmerman. The mistake was his

own; the redesigning and rebuilding of this part would be out of his own pocket, but there was not a moment's hesitation.

"Redesign that, Schmalze," he said to the foreman. "Then let me see it before you put it through."

That was off his mind, he turned to Chic. He was standing with his foot on one of the steel pieces; his elbow was resting on his thick, fat leg, while in his hand he held his cigar. There was only one expression on that square, iron face, a slight narrowing of the eyes.

"By the way, Cotton, have you seen Queenie lately?"

"No, not recently."

"So you ain't seen her?"

"No, sir; not lately."

The foreman now came up with a question. Zimmerman slowly took his leg from the steel piece and moved away with him. It was the day after Chic had been to Coney Island to see Queenie.

As Chic went away a little argument was set up in his mind, for it must be known that Chic was a very queer person, indeed. If he didn't want to believe a thing, then immediately a shadowy mind of his began to function. This wish mind could think of an amazing number of things to banish the possibility of anything unpleasant happening.

Why, of course, the wish mind said, Zimmerman didn't suspect. There was no way for Zimmerman to find out that he had seen Queenie that evening. Maybe he had just asked the question to make conversation. Why, it was perfectly natural for Zimmerman to ask about Queenie, since they both knew her.

Zimmerman didn't think of anything, that bozo didn't, except building

parks and working out new rides and making money. What if he did suspect? Zimmerman didn't own Queenie. He was just her employer, that was all. There was nothing to get jealous over. Queenie didn't care for him—look how much older he was. Strange about Queenie in that respect. She never talked about Zimmerman, never said anything one way or the other. That showed she wasn't interested. Thus the comforting wish mind continued to smooth out difficulties.

Chic began dillydallying about telling Charmian. He could think of many reasons why he shouldn't inform her; leastways, not yet. Just wait a few days more. Then he'd go to see her and tell her. Yes, he would.

One of the reasons was his mother. From time to time he had written Mrs. Cotton, telling of the progress of his acquaintance with Charmian, and his mother had been delighted.

And then had come Chic's letter telling of his engagement. Mrs. Cotton had been greatly pleased; almost too good to be true, and yet it had happened. How well everything was turning out for Chic. His invention had been accepted, it was now being built, it would be tried out in the spring; engaged to the daughter of Marion De Ford, her old girlhood friend.

What a wise move it was that Chic had gone to New York! Soon she would go to see him and they would have a happy reunion.

In his letters home, Chic had not mentioned Queenie. He knew that she was not the kind of girl his mother would understand. He could imagine his mother's surprise on the receipt of such a letter—her son taking up with a tight-rope walker at Coney Island!

In spite of dillydallying the day came. And that was what it seemed

like, the day. It was marked and set apart from all other days. Charmian was to have a house dance, and had invited Chic. Well, he would go; he would break the news to her then.

What irony it was—to let a girl invite you to a dance and then get her off in the corner and tell her that you didn't love her any more. What a funny thing life is! Fuller of tangles than a piece of thread that a cat has been playing with.

But he wouldn't be quite that bald; wouldn't get her off in the corner between dances, hem and haw and then spill it. No. He'd have more gumption than that. He would wait until the others had gone home, her parents would be upstairs, and then, in the library, he would tell her that he had always admired her, and that he wished to count her as a friend, but that each should be free to do what he or she wanted. They were very young; he had his career yet to make, his circumstances were not what hers were. It would be best, everything considered.

December now, and it was snowing. Like a Christmas movie, he thought as he got off the train at the haughty little station at Floral Gardens. But very lovely, indeed. A host of sleek, magnificent cars stood at the curb, before the station, while in the background the taxis waited as if recognizing that they belonged to a socially inconsequential world. A horn cleared its throat politely, a hand waved, a bright smile flashed, and there she was. Dear Charmian. Who would soon be made to suffer.

"Hello, this is a nice-looking taxi. What's your rate? I think I'll ride with you. Got your name and picture in the car?"

Better talk that way than be long-faced about it.

"I haven't got my name here, because I thought I'd change it."

Um—kind of awkward. Brought him up with a jolt.

The car sped away on its lovely junket through the town; Floral Gardens in winter; snow; the song of the chains; lights in the window; young people enveloped in huge fur coats; laughter; and then the blaze of light which was Charmian's home. A line of cars waited outside, with their headlights extinguished, but with their little, protruding buglike eyes dreamily staring into the night.

"Car barn; all out," announced Charmian.

A pleasant hubbub greeted Chic's ears as the door was opened by the butler. Chic could see young men in evening clothes and young ladies in whatever girls wear, fluttering to and fro with the expectations of a pleasant evening before them.

In the kitchen a caterer was buzzing about, counting, checking, and mapping out his campaign, while the De Ford staff, now suddenly no longer of consequence in the world, looked upon him with silent poison. And outside, in the great hall and reception room, voices rose and laughter tinkled as if all was well with the world.

At sight of Charmian there was a flutter, and an eddy of young humanity swirled around her, laughing, talking, jesting. In the billiard room the orchestra had gathered, and about it was strewn a gaping collection of bags and cases, while the men had their last cigarettes before tiptoeing inconspicuously into the hall between the drawing-room and library.

Chic recalled the time when he had first come into the house and had thought that he had stumbled upon a Grand Duke's Ball, whereas, in reality,

it had been a simple dinner party. He remembered the uncertainty he had suffered in the dining room and how he had done combat with a salad fork; but now he knew no such suffering; the clodhopper feeling was gone. New York had done much for him. He was finding his place in the world. He chatted lightly with Mrs. De Ford, and talked to Mr. De Ford, man to man.

Null and Void was there, talking in that slightly simpering way of his of a world that Chic knew nothing about; but Chic no longer wished politely to crush him. Instead, he gave him a slap on the back.

"How're you, Null, old boy? Glad to see you still alive," he said genially.

The intoxication of the evening stole over him, the music beat in his ears, how sweet and lovely Charmian looked. Charming Charmian, indeed. Now he was dancing with her; her hair brushed his cheek, he looked down into the pools of her eyes.

"I wish I didn't have to tell her tonight," he thought. "But I've got to do it," he added.

Now and then during the course of the evening his eye caught hers; she smiled, an exquisite sense of elation floated over him. And then his mind would flash back to Queenie. Queenie was all right; cute kid; but—

Now the dance was over; the caterer and his staff had gone long ago; the musicians had returned their instruments to their cases and had been swallowed up by the night. The last car of guests had gone, Mr. and Mrs. De Ford had gone upstairs—the moment had come!

"Charmian, there is something I want to say to you. It's about ourselves—our future together—our engagement. I have been thinking it

over, and I believe that we ought to let it rest a while. We are young yet; how my invention and business plans are going I don't know. I respect you highly, but in lieu of everything, I think it best that we consider things a little longer."

That was the way he had planned to say it. There would be tears, of course; she would sob, then slowly grow cold and proud, and then he would shake her hand and steal away into the night like a criminal.

But it didn't work out that way. All during the evening his determination to tell her had been weakening; the music, the soft, captivating movement of the dance, Charmian in his arms, the touch of her hand, her smile.

"I won't say it just now, I'll call her up by telephone and tell her."

Yes, that was the thing to do. Why hadn't he thought of it before? He could explain very calmly then. The idea of coming to her dance and then slapping her in the face with a broken engagement was ridiculous.

"You do like me, don't you, darling?" he heard her say as they sat on a sofa.

"Of course I do, Charmian, you know that," he declared.

"I just wanted you to say it, that's all. Girls are foolish, I suppose, but it's the way God made us."

It was nice foolish talk.

The chime clock in the hall ticked on; the house grew stiller, and more and more they seemed to be part of each other.

"When do you think we ought to get married?"

Chic's heart gave a leap. Now was the time to say it—spit it out—but the thought was devastating.

"I—I don't know."

"Don't you think the spring would

be nice? In June. I know people make fun of June weddings, now, but I don't care if they do. I like them."

Chic heard himself talking, saying words. Yes, spring was a lovely time.

The chime clock played a golden tune. It seemed incredible that it was so late. He must go.

"I'll get out the car and run you down," she said.

The car came out, they got in, sped away; the train came, he mounted the steps.

The run through the crisp night air had cleared his brain, and now, as the train sped away toward New York, he was amazed at himself. He hadn't done anything he had expected to do. Instead of his engagement being broken off, it had been moved up.

He slunk down into the seat. "I'll be damned!"

Whoo-whoo said the train.

CHAPTER XXVII

EXPLAINING CHIC'S GIRL-SHYNESS

MRS. COTTON sitting in her son's room in New York, glanced at the alarm clock ticking away on the bureau. A quarter after five. Chic would be home by half past five or twenty minutes of six, and then they would have another evening together.

This was the second day that Mrs. Cotton had been in New York. The first evening she had been tired, and just to see Chic was enough. How well and strong he looked, handsomer than ever.

The next day she would go to see her old friend, Mrs. De Ford, and then they would all have dinner at the De Ford home. But this evening belonged to her and Chic alone.

Mrs. Cotton looked around the room. It wasn't anything, pretty cheap; poor pictures on the wall, a terrible bed, but Chic had never complained. Instead, he had written humorous, exaggerated descriptions of the bed and the rain-streaked fruit pictures on the wall. Chic's flights of fancy had made her smile, but now the room was no laughing matter. Soon he would give it up for something better.

New York had been very good to him, indeed. He had found work almost immediately; he had had promotions in the radio factory; his invention had been accepted by the great Mr. Zimmerman; and best of all, he had become engaged to Charmian. On the bureau was Charmian's picture, very large and expensive, and at the other end of the bureau was her own.

Rising from her chair, Mrs. Cotton went to the bureau, picked up Charmian's picture and stood holding it tenderly in her hand. It was like all the modern photographs, rather vague and shimmery, with thin, fading edges. She didn't like it as well as the clear, sharp, definite portraits they had made when she was a young lady—many things were not quite so good as "in her day"—but in spite of the new-fangled ways of doing things the picture did reveal what a lovely girl Charmian had grown into.

Mrs. Cotton passed her handkerchief over it, wiping away some lingering dust, and unconsciously, as she looked into the smiling eyes of the picture a smile came into her own face.

A glow of satisfaction rose in her soul. To-morrow she would see Charmian, put her arms around the girl, and tell her—when Chic was not present—what beautiful letters Chic wrote about her.

And now, as she thought of Charmian, she was glad she had kept Chic clean and pure. This passion was deep in her. The reason for it was a bitter and devastating experience which had come into her life.

She had been brought up a "sheltered" child; only the necessary facts of life were imparted to her; and in this idealized state she had met John Cotton. He was a young city engineer, and about him there was a dash and go which had fascinated her. John Cotton had always been a bit "wild," but to her this seemed vague and inconsequential. He loved her, that was all that mattered. Their love, now that they were married, would be untarnished.

But she was to have a shock. Each year Junction City had a Chautauqua, and John Cotton was its local manager. One of the Chautauqua entertainers was a lady elocutionist—a feature now happily out of style. She was pretty, she made people laugh, she made them cry, and when John Cotton presented her to the audiences he gave her the floweriest introduction he had ever bestowed upon anybody.

Later Mr. Cotton took mysterious business trips out of town; he was called to Kansas City, once he had gone to Des Moines, and then had come the great shock. There was a railroad wreck, her husband was killed, and in the sleeper with him was the lady elocutionist!

It was the sensation of the town—the bringing back of his body, the funeral, the whispering. The shock had been a terrific and a stunning one.

And now it seemed to Mrs. Cotton that the cause of it all had been the way that Chic's father had been brought up—"loosely." If his parents should have watched over him more

carefully, her life would not have been wrecked, she thought. And so there formed in her mind the desire to keep her own son pure. He must never do anything cheap; he must cherish an ideal of women. As she talked to Chic she had looked deeply and hypnotically into his eyes, and often it was just before he went to bed at night.

Although Mrs. Cotton had not realized it, the result was to make Chic self-conscious in the presence of girls. "Girl shy," it was called. He had never been through the "experiences" that other young men of his age had had. And thus he had come to New York, and in this state he had remained—always a bit ill at ease in the presence of girls, a bit shy and yet yearning—until he had met Queenie.

CHAPTER XXVIII

QUEENIE STAGES A DÉNOUEMENT

MRS. COTTON had taken a room in the same house with Chic, so she could be near him, and now, dressed in clothes of not quite the latest fashion, she sat eagerly awaiting her son.

Each minute in New York must be made to count, and so in her lap was Chic's mending. All her life she had performed these little ministrations, then he had moved away; and now some day Charmian would be doing these things for him.

While she sat there, stiff and upright, as Mrs. Cotton always sat, plying her needle, the years seemed to slip away; it seemed hardly real that her little Chic was now a grown man, living in New York, and some day would be married. As she waited with the roar of the street below, the sense of how quickly life rushed by came to

her. So many things she had wanted to do, so many unfulfilled dreams.

There was a step on the stairway, Chic was coming home, and unconsciously Mrs. Cotton began to roll up her mending. This could be finished to-morrow; now all her time must be Chic's.

The steps came closer they paused, there was a knock at the door. It was strange that Chic should knock, for he usually came bursting in like a school-boy.

Slowly the door opened, and to her amazement she saw a young woman!

Mrs. Cotton gave the pleasant little laugh she had for persons who blundered, and whom she wished to make feel as comfortable as possible.

"I guess you've come to the wrong room, this is my son's."

"This is Chic Cotton's, ain't it?"

"Yes, my son's."

"He's the one I want to see."

Why had this brightly clothed, blond-haired, vermilion-lipped flapper come to his room? Mrs. Cotton experienced fear that the girl might have designs on her son. But aloud she said pleasantly:

"I'm expecting my son home in a few minutes. Do you wish to wait?"

"Why not? I want to see him 'specially."

Mrs. Cotton rose and made a gesture toward a chair. She'd be pleasant, but in a few minutes Chic would return and dispose of the intruder.

"Won't you be seated, Miss—I don't believe I know your name."

"Queenie Johnson."

"Won't you take this chair here? It's more comfortable. I was just doing some mending for my son."

Instinctively Mrs. Cotton felt a resentment against this bright, calm, self-possessed, dazzling girl. What

did she mean by knocking at her son's door? But she mustn't show it. That wouldn't be good manners; besides, it would all be explained when Chic arrived.

Probably the girl lived in the house, but it was strange she should come so unceremoniously to the door. Or maybe it was some one from Chic's office who had come on business.

But Mrs. Cotton said nothing like that; she must be hostess in her son's name. She had traveled to New York to see her son she explained; she had expected the train trip to be tiresome, but it hadn't been. On the contrary, she had found it interesting. It was the first time she had ever been East in her life. It was very different, indeed, from the Middle West, but she thought that it was interesting, too; the thing that had surprised her most of all was not the skyscrapers, but the window displays on Fifth Avenue. They were fascinating.

She paused after this first rush of words. Why didn't this jazzy girl explain who she was? The silence gave her a chance, but Queenie cleared up no mystery.

"He ought to been here before this," the girl said.

"That means she knows a great deal about him," Mrs. Cotton thought instantly.

Now she would draw the girl out.

"Do you work in my son's office?"

"No, I've never been in it."

"I haven't either," returned Mrs. Cotton in the same pleasant voice. "But I expect to be in a day or two. My son's an inventor, you know," she declared proudly.

"Yeh. I know all about the 'Giant Top.'"

"Oh, do you?" exclaimed Mrs. Cotton genially; but a little voice in her

asked: "Who *can* she be? What does she want? How could Chic ever have taken up with her?"

Now she would put a stop to it—

"My son and I are going to dinner together to-night at the Waldorf-Astoria. To-morrow we're going to one of the suburbs to visit an old school-girl friend of mine."

Queenie made a little movement of dismissal.

"We're just chewing the rag. Don't you know me?"

"I don't believe I do."

"Hasn't Chic told you about me?" she asked in astonishment.

"No. I don't believe he has."

"That's funny," Queenie said. "Hasn't he ever told you my name?"

"No."

There was a silence while the two women looked at each other.

"I'm the wire walker down at Coney Island." Queenie gave a proud smile. "Now I guess you know me."

"No, I'm afraid not."

"Ain't he ever told you *anything* about me?"

Mrs. Cotton felt that this in some way reflected on her son. Maybe this strange, bizarre creature was some one at Coney Island who had to do with his top.

"I don't believe he has. He doesn't write very long letters," she explained.

"I mean, since you hit town?"

"I really haven't seen much of him since I arrived in New York," Mrs. Cotton returned with dignity. Such grammar, such slang as the girl used.

Mrs. Cotton had now had time to think it over. "You say you have something to do at Coney Island?"

"I'm the wire walker there."

Mrs. Cotton had never heard the phrase. A wire walker. What did she mean by that? She smiled polite-

ly, as one does who wishes to please, but who has a growing feeling of unplaced resentment.

"I don't believe I know what that is," she said.

"Tight-rope walker, I guess that's what you'd call it."

"Oh, indeed." It was the pleasant, trained part of her speaking. Then, "You mean you walk a tight rope at Coney Island?"

"Yes."

There rose before Mrs. Cotton a vision of the tight-rope walkers and exhibitionists as she had seen them at Junction City street fairs and corn carnivals—cheap, bedraggled creatures, making easy street acquaintances. They would stay a few days at a boarding house, often there was a scandal after they left. So this girl, who was on such friendly terms with her son, was one of them!

"Is that what you do, walk a tight rope?"

Queenie bristled. Was that what she did! she repeated. Queenie was very proud of her position; all the people of her world looked up to her, she was envied, she was a great success. And, indeed, she was "an artist on the wire," as the announcements declared. The best in America, the highest paid; her picture appeared in the papers, posters and placards of her were everywhere; great crowds stood gazing up at her delighted and thrilled—and now this old-fashioned, small-town woman—one of the "monkeys"—looked down on her!

"Yes, that's what I do. You don't think much of it, do you?"

"No, I wouldn't say that," Mrs. Cotton declared. She just didn't know much about it; but Queenie caught all that the tone and manner implied, and now took a cigarette from her case and

calmly lit it as she studied Mrs. Cotton.

"Smoking cigarettes," thought Mrs. Cotton as she watched a cloud which Queenie discharged. Although Mrs. Cotton knew many girls who smoked, she did not approve of it. There was really nothing wrong with the practice, but it was not ladylike. And now it seemed particularly offensive and out of place.

"It's what you'd expect of a tight-rope walker," she mused.

Then Queenie spoke:

"I guess Chic's saving it as the big surprise for you. Him and I are engaged, didn't you know that?"

For a moment Mrs. Cotton thought that she had not heard rightly. Before she seemed to have time to think she said:

"How do you mean? I don't think I understand."

Queenie gave a little laugh, and suddenly felt a keen dislike for this woman.

"Just what I said. We're going to get married."

Mrs. Cotton's hands, which had lain inertly in her lap, began to pull at each other, and suddenly she felt under a terrific strain such as she sometimes had had in a dream—and then had wakened up to find it was not true.

"I think there must be some mistake," she said. "My son is engaged to this young lady here"—indicating the photograph on the bureau—"she's the daughter of my oldest and dearest friend."

"Did he tell you that?"

Mrs. Cotton began to rock with quick, nervous movements. "Yes," she declared with dignity. "And it's true, too. I'm going to meet her tomorrow. That's the reason, partly, why I came on to New York."

Out came a cloud of smoke.

"I think you're on the wrong wire, Mrs. Cotton. Chic and I are engaged, and if you think you're going to come on here and bust it you're pretty badly mistaken."

Never had she come to his room except the time she had put the note under the door, and now here she was again.

"Hello," he said in a subdued key, intensely aware of her presence.



"My son is engaged to this young lady here!"

It was all plain, now, what Mrs. Cotton was trying to do—a wire walker wasn't good enough for her darling son. Well, she'd show her.

The two women glared at each other in a silence which was broken by the sound of some one coming lightly up the stairs.

The knob turned, Chic entered.

CHAPTER XXIX

SHATTERED IDEALS



HELLO, mom," Chic called gayly, and then the room seemed to revolve slightly. Queenie! What in the world was she doing here? What an amazing girl Queenie was!

"Hello, kid."

"She calls him 'kid,'" thought Mrs. Cotton. "She's vulgar." But Chic would now send this strange, bizarre girl on her way.

"This young lady came to the door a while ago, and has been waiting for you," Mrs. Cotton explained, and it was as if she had said, "I know it's all a mistake, but I had to let her stay until you came."

Queenie rose.

"Can't you slip us a kiss, 'bo?"

'Bo! Such language! And asking Chic to kiss her. But that was, of course, to have her revenge. It was to be expected of a tight-rope walker.

Chic stood in agony a moment. What should he do? But the question

answered itself, for Queenie suddenly threw her arms around his neck. In her hand, as her arm went around his neck, was the cigarette. A curl of smoke went floating up. And then, before Mrs. Cotton's eyes, she kissed him.

"Who is this young woman? She says she's engaged to you," quavered Mrs. Cotton, stirred with emotion. "That's what she says."

Chic stood hesitating, looking from his mother to Queenie.

"She isn't engaged to you, is she, Chic?" came a pleading voice.

And now, as he stood there between the two women, his brain was reeling. But he must do the right thing by Queenie. That was forever fixed in his mind.

"Yes, mother!"

Mrs. Cotton sat as if stunned; almost as if she had not heard at all.

Queenie spoke:

"I'm going to tell you something, Mrs. Cotton. I suppose I oughtn't to do it, because there ain't any net under me, but I'm going to swing off, anyway. I like Chic the hell of a lot; I'm crazy about him, and always have been, and I think he—well, likes me some. Now I'm getting down to what I was goin' to say. I liked him well enough to give up everything I had to him. So we decided we're goin' to get married."

Mrs. Cotton sat numbly for a moment, and then very carefully picked a raveling from the mending off her dress, slowly rolled it between her thumb and finger, and then dropped it into the wastebasket.

"That's a lie, isn't it, Chic?"

"No, mother, it's not. It's true."

For a moment it seemed as if Mrs. Cotton did not fully realize. No, it couldn't be, after the sheltered way

she had reared her son. Her son! Her darling son. Her son who was engaged to Charmian.

She would break it off. This person was probably a "loose" woman. Naturally a girl at Coney Island would be. What a horrible creature she was! Overpainted, coarse, a tight-rope walker!

Chic must tell her about it; she would see how Queenie had deliberately led her son astray. And as the three sat in the little room, Chic told the story; whatever had happened that caused him to deceive Charmian, he was the one to blame, not Queenie.

As Mrs. Cotton listened her spirits sank lower and lower. Now he had finished, and numbly, almost expressionlessly, she sat looking at the son who had disgraced himself. It was his father's blood. After she had tried so hard all her life to eradicate it!

And at this moment, too, when she had come all the way to New York to see him in triumph, and to give Charmian her blessing, this—this awful thing should happen!

She would send the girl away, and then she would subtly work on Chic; she would drop small insinuations about Queenie and poison Chic's mind. She would break it off, not at once, but gradually; it might take months. She would stay in New York, get a small apartment with her son; she could bring it about.

But no, that would not be right. He could not turn tail and run to Charmian after having deceived her.

Mrs. Cotton bent forward.

"Are you set on marrying her, Chic?"

"Yes."

"Don't you think it could be fixed up some way?"

"I don't want it 'fixed up some

way,' mother. Really, mom," and now Chic's face brightened, "she's a fine girl, and I'm crazy about her," and taking Queenie's bediamonded hand he squeezed it tenderly.

Mrs. Cotton felt a great weariness; it was not all quite clear in her mind, but that fact remained—her son must do what his heart dictated. There was a dash of tears to her eyes. For a moment she wept hysterically.

"My poor little boy," she wailed, seizing his hands; he seemed her little curly-haired child again. Soon the tears were gone, and to her surprise Mrs. Cotton felt refreshed. She glanced at the clock, surprised at how late it was.

"We better go out and eat supper."

The two women paused before the mirror, arranging themselves for going out.

"All right, Chic; all right, Queenie," Mrs. Cotton said in a voice that she strove to make calm and natural. "I'm ready."

And then the three started down the creaking stairs on their way to the dinner that Mrs. Cotton had looked forward to.

CHAPTER XXX

CHIC CROSSES HIS RUBICON



FEW days later Chic went to see Charmian. Never in his life had he disliked so poignantly to do anything as he did this.

If only he could delay a few days; put it off a while. But he could not. He must inform Charmian before his mother visited her old friend. If he waited until his mother saw Mrs. De Ford, and if Mrs. De Ford assumed that the engagement was on, then it would be all the more difficult.

How bitterly he felt the disappointment that was his mother's! She had gone over many times in her mind this reunion when she and her old friend should meet and when their two children would be brought together, and now his mother must go to Mrs. De Ford knowing that the engagement was broken.

Charmian was waiting in the big drawing-room when Chic arrived. It was here that he had first met her father; and it was here that he had burst into the Grand Duke's Ball, but now he no longer felt ill at ease.

There was the awkward matter of why Mrs. Cotton had not yet come to see Charmian's mother, but Chic got over it as best he could. The train trip had been hard, his mother had wanted to buy a few clothes first, she had already talked to Charmian's mother over the telephone; she would call up again to-morrow.

Charmian had never before seemed so sweet and lovely; to-day she was particularly animated. She had just received an offer to appear in her first important concert, and she was full of the subject. Her appearance over the radio had done much for her; her picture had been in the papers many times.

"I wish I didn't have to tell her," a little agonized voice in him cried as he sat across from her. And now for a moment he cast desperately about in his mind to find a way out. Maybe, if he just let things go along, they'd work themselves out. Often he had heard people say that; it was such a pleasant way of evading the unpleasant present. But such evasion was not a part of Chic.

"Now I'm going to do it," he said silently to himself.

"Listen, Charmian," a strange, hollow voice began, "there's something I

want to say to you. It's about our getting married. It's this way—er—don't you think we had better think it over first?"

He saw Charmian look at him in astonishment, saw her stiffen. "Think it over first?" What did he mean by that? Her foot was swinging, but when Chic started to talk it stopped, and she sat so very quietly that she seemed hardly to be hearing at all.

Oh, it was quite all right, she said as he finished. She was glad, indeed, that he had come to her and told her frankly that he had fallen in love with another girl. It was much better than to exchange letters, or to do it over the telephone. She quite understood.

"Is it the girl who was in Mr. Zimmerman's office that day at Coney Island" she asked.

"Yes."

"The one you said that you didn't know very well?"

"Yes."

"But you had known her all the time? You had been seeing her and— and making love to her all the time you had been coming to see me?"

"Yes," he managed to say.

"And now you are engaged to her?"

"Yes."

"So you think she's very lovely and you want to marry her?"

"Yes."

At last it was over; he stood up, time to go. Although he had not admitted it to himself, he had expected Charmian to weep and to become emotional, but instead of that she was very calm. Now her foot was swinging again; going to the piano, she played a few bars, she smiled.

"Of course it's a shock to her, but she doesn't really care," thought Chic.

"I can see how it is," said Char-

mian. "She's a tight-rope walker, and interested in Coney Island and in show life, and your top will draw you right into that life. I think you two ought to be very happy together, indeed."

"I think so, too," declared Chic.

Chic was now at the door, and as he stood looking at her there was a peculiar, heavy ache in his heart.

"Good-by," he said.

"Good-by."

And then he turned and walked slowly in the direction of the station without looking back.

CHAPTER XXXI

QUEENIE PAYS HER WAY



CHIC could hardly believe what had happened. He went over in his mind the scene at the house and what he had said to her.

It was very simple, not melodramatic at all. He could see her sitting there, very quietly, her foot swinging. The foot stopped, the smile faded from her face, now and then her fingers moved slightly. That was all.

He saw the startled look come into her face when he told her he had been in love with Queenie all the time that he had been engaged to Charmian. He heard again her questions, heard again those short, formal, icy "Good-bys," saw himself walking out as if it mattered not at all.

And now without her, New York seemed lonely again, like when he had first come. There were just as many people as ever; they crowded and pushed and shoved just as much as ever, only in some curious way they didn't seem so real now. Sort of like faint figures moving in a dream. He took a dislike to them. Nobodies,

most of them; just cluttering up valuable space for nothing.

The days at the workshop seemed longer. Seemed as if noon would never come. During the lunch hour he had always come back quickly and studied his books or performed experiments of his own in the laboratory on different phases of radio; but now he lost all interest in them. The books were dry reading; the experiments didn't amount to anything.

Also he had arranged to work two nights a week in an experimental laboratory which he had rented for the purpose from a man who had a well-equipped place, but now he gave this up. It wasn't getting him anywhere, he decided.

He began to go to the theaters more than ever; mostly musical comedies. He liked to see the girls dancing and singing; it got his mind off things, he thought.

But he had no intention of calling Charmian up, or of seeing her again. That was all settled. He would do the square thing by Queenie. Besides, he told himself, Queenie was a very nice girl, indeed; there were many fine things to be said about her.

The radio in his room got so that it scratched and buzzed and was full of static. Now and then he would turn it on, but it only annoyed him. Finally he gave it to the landlady.

At night he had uneasy dreams. But the strange part of it was that they were not about Charmian at all. Usually they were about himself trying to do something, like walking along a road, or climbing a mountainside and finding trees blown across his path. No sense to the dreams.

He didn't like his room. Never had been very good; too noisy, bed was terrible. Street was much more noisy than it used to be. People in the other rooms didn't do anything except quarrel. Landlady was getting too nosy, too. He would pull up stakes and move.

One day a blow fell. He was idly looking

through the paper when his eyes caught a line. It was about the sailings of the steamships: Charmian and her mother were going abroad. Abroad! Going to Italy. Why, she was on the ocean now, at this minute. Chic had a curious, terrified feeling.

Further along in the list of passengers he had found Null and Void. That ol' idiot. Just like him. He'd get her over there and marry her, that's what he'd do.

But, of course, that would be all right, Chic tried to assure himself. She had a perfect right to marry that bespectacled nincompoop, if she wanted to. Of course, she could; he himself was going to marry Queenie. Charmian had a right to marry any-



"We'd better think it over first"

body she wanted to. It wasn't any concern of his.

But it wasn't all gloom. Wasn't all depression. After the first shock was over, Chic began to think of reasons why he was *glad* that it had happened.

Charmian was richer than he was; he might always be embarrassed by that fact. It had been inconvenient to go to Floral Gardens; late at night the train service was bad. Now he would not have to run around with a lot of her friends that he didn't like. Some of them were pretty weak sisters. Why, after all, it wasn't as bad as he had thought.

On top of it other strange thoughts came tumbling. If Charmian and ol' Null and Void did get married, he probably wouldn't treat her right. That idiot couldn't. And then Charmian would be sorry that she had married him. Maybe ol' Null and Void would die, or she'd divorce him, or something. He himself would meet her on the street, he would see the agony and suffering in her face. But, still, he didn't really want her to suffer.

What a strange confusion his thoughts led him into. Like one of the mystic mazes at Coney Island. Only Coney Island wasn't as interesting and fascinating as it used to be. Pretty cheap in lots of ways.

Other strange things occurred. Mrs. Cotton didn't like New York so well.

The noise got on her nerves. People pushed her on the streets and shoved her in the subway. After you have seen the Fifth Avenue shop windows once there isn't anything new, she said.

The hotels and restaurants had such high prices. She couldn't sleep well at night. People were so impolite.

She would go for walks in Central Park, but they tired her. Afternoons she went to the museums and art galleries; they tired her feet and made her back ache.

In the evenings Chic said he was worn out and would not take her to the places she wanted to go. They began to get on each other's nerves. Now and



then Chic wished she hadn't come to New York at all; his own mother!

At last, Mrs. Cotton decided to go home earlier than she had expected. There were many things at home which needed to be looked after, she said.

Chic and Queenie put her on the train. At last it pulled out. Mrs. Cotton heaved a little sigh and sat looking straight ahead of her as the train rushed through the suburbs which had been so fascinating as she had come into New York.

There were no such moods and depressions for Queenie. A great and wonderful piece of good luck had happened to her; fate had been very kind indeed. And, like all the others among the amusement park people, she be-

lieved in a mysterious and unseen power which exercised force over human beings. Sometimes this power was whimsical and played cruel pranks, sometimes it was beneficent and handed out rich rewards. But always, whatever its mood, it must be placated.

She had strange ideas about good luck and bad luck signs. One of them was to keep an old shoe so that it could always be seen from some place in her room. Another was to have something setting on top of her trunks.

"They're my good luck signs," she would say. And although she took them lightly, and would herself laugh at them, she could not be persuaded to give any of them up.

"You can laugh if you want to," she said to him at another time, "but the week before I met you I went to a mitt reader and she said that inside of a week I was going to meet a light complected man who was going to mean a change in my life, and on the seventh day after that I met you. Laugh that off if you can."

Queenie began to take possession of her man. Here was a handsome young fellow, rather dashing in some ways, and it had been set down by fate that he was going to mean a great change in her life. He was better educated than the young men of the circus and amusement park world. He had been two years at a college, and to Queenie this was greatly impressive. He was going to be a great inventor; if things went right he would have a "ride" in Coney Island, and if it were a success in Coney Island it would go to the amusement parks and summer resorts all over the country.

She began to show him off. Almost at any hour she would call up, and Chic would go down to the wall coin telephone at the bottom of the stair-

way of his rooming house and talk to her.

"Hello, kid," she would say. "How'd you like to go out this evening and step? The Coney Elks are throwing a ball, and I've got a couple of pasteboards. Get into your jewelry and we'll show 'em who's in town."

Chic had to keep a watchful eye on money. He hated to let Queenie know how closely he had to count his pennies, but soon she suspected and very adroitly began to pay the larger expenses.

"Now don't be silly about it," she said practically. "I'm a movie star, I am, and it ain't going to break me up to turn loose some of it. When you get the top going, and the money is coming up and puttin' its head on your shoulder, then it 'll be different. I'll act like a lady then, but just now you let me have my way. It's either that or sit at home alone, and you know I ain't strong on lonesome stuff."

Chic protested; it was a man's place to pay the expenses, but it was as she had said; they would have to miss many things all on account of an old-fashioned idea. Whatever Queenie's faults, stinginess was not one of them. She was in love with Chic, he was the finest young man she had ever met; they were going to get married, she had the money, why shouldn't she stand the greater part of the expense?

Chic met her friends oftener and peered more deeply into the life she led. Her friends were "show people" — "performers" they called themselves—and belonged to the world of amusement parks, circuses and carnivals. Their attitude toward the public was a curious one of half disdain and half eagerness to please. The people were "monkeys" and "towners" and "gawks," but at the same time it

amazed him how hard they would work, and to what infinite pains they would go to please this disdained public.

One of her friends was Frozo; it was the only name Chic ever knew him by. Frozo had once been an important person in his little world. He had worked up a ballyhoo in which he took the part of a mechanical doll for a "grind show" at Coney Island.

In front of the show was a platform, screened by a curtain, and when the curtain was drawn aside, Frozo, with the immovable face, would be before the people who were to be "turned" into the show. The barker would deliver his talk, put his hand under Frozo's coat, wind him up, and then Frozo would begin to move his hands and legs with the jerky motions of a mechanical doll while the monkeys tried to decide whether he was real or wax.

Frozo had had many imitators, but none had been so successful as Frozo. Even the best of them could not "turn" the crowds as he could. But those days were over. The mechanical doll game, as Frozo put it, was dead. A new "bally" could last only a certain length of time, when everybody would begin to copy it, and then it would have to be shelved.

Things had not gone well lately with Frozo. Not an amusement park in the country wanted a mechanical doll bally, even by the king of them all, and Frozo had bumped around from one thing to another. He had been an outside talker, an inside lecturer, a clown; he had gone out for a while as an escape artist, but it had been hard sledding.

One day Queenie took Chic to see Frozo. Frozo by this time had moved to a performers' rooming house in the

Forties, near Eighth Avenue, where the strange people on the fringe of the show racket hang out.

"I guess you can hear him all right," the landlady said after they had rung the bell, for the musty hall was filled with weird wailings.

Queenie knocked at the door where the moanings were coming from. There, sitting on the bed, in a frayed and dilapidated bathrobe, was Frozo, practicing on a saxophone.

Say, this was quite a surprise. Set down. Well, he was just learning how to push wind into a sax. Was going to get a good job, too. Big demand for saxophone players.

Tied to the chipped iron grille work of his bed was a book of instructions which he had bought from goodness knows where, and Frozo, who had once been the sensational bally of Coney Island, was now tooting painfully away, trying to master it.

While Queenie and Frozo were talking, Chic took the book which made such golden promises and looked through the table of contents. The book promised to produce the laugh, cry, moan, sneeze, bark, yelp, roar, smear, meow, caw, autohorn, and to perform the "novel effects, tricks and stunts" used by world famous saxophone artists.

Chic marveled at it. What in the world did a smear sound like when produced on a saxophone? What was a caw?

He spoke to Queenie about it, but in it Queenie saw nothing astonishing or amazing. To her it was simply lessons on the saxophone, and "saxes" now were all the go.

"S' long," said Frozo, as Chic and Queenie were leaving. He sat down on the unmade bed again, the little leather strap went over his head, and

as Chic and Queenie started down the hall the saxophone began to cry and moan.

Chic went with her to see other of her friends; they were all of the same kind, although some were more prosperous than others.

Queenie became more and more interested in Chic. It was hard for her to believe that such a simpleton as he had seemed at first, peeking through a window at a dancing class, could really be such a trustworthy and high-minded young man.

There were lots of fakers and gyps and come-on artists in her world, and at first she had watched him critically. Queenie had few illusions about the monkeys who wanted to start an acquaintance with her, but here was a good-looking fellow from some hick town in Missouri or Iowa, or somewhere out there, who didn't pretend anything. Green as grass in lots of ways, sure didn't know anything about girls, but in Queenie's eyes he was a polished gentleman, and she became, as she said, "goofy" about him.

But now as she began earnestly to love him, the wire walker assumed an entirely different attitude. When they had first become acquainted she had kissed him lightly and casually, for kissing meant little in Queenie's life, but gradually her kisses became warm and filled with the quick, deep tenseness of her nature.

Whenever a girl of her type goes into a thing whole-heartedly, a change sweeps over her life.

"According to my way of thinking," Queenie said, "why shouldn't a girl play around a little if she wants to, especially when she knows she's not going to get snagged? But when a girl slips the ring, and says 'I do,' then that's an automobile of a differ-

ent color. She's promised to play fair with her husband as long as he plays fair with her, she ought to do it, and that's what I would do, too. If I got married, and John Gilbert even so much as winked at me, I'd hang one on him."

Then she threw her arms around her man and kissed him with the deep, moving passion which was hers.

At such moments Chic was deeply moved. The thrill of holding her in his arms; the smell of her hair, the faint perfume, the soft ivory whiteness of her skin, the unexpected and astonishing strength which she had for a girl so dainty and shapely.

"I do love her," he would declare to himself. "She's the finest girl in the world!"

But away down at the bottom of some mysterious and uncovered depths of his nature he was not satisfied. She was nice, yes; absolutely fair and square, after one knew her code; warm, generous, affectionate, sometimes witty—"awfully good company," he thought of her as being—and yet he wished she were different. Just how, he hardly knew. Well, more like Charmian. Lovely, cultured, spiritual, high-minded Charmian—

But still that was all over. She'd gone to Europe with ol' Null and Void, probably sittin' around some Italian villa now, and he would be making love to her. *Ugh!* Sickening. That damn fool!

Chic could hardly put his finger on it, this difference between Charmian and Queenie. Of course, Charmian was well educated, could rattle off two or three languages, and had traveled abroad, and was a musician and knew important people. No, it wasn't that. Queenie had her points, too. Big, strong, admirable points. The words

were hard to find, but Charmian had such a—a fine spiritual quality.

CHAPTER XXXII

A MYSTERIOUS INVITATION



OW and then Queenie was in moods. This was strange, too, Chic thought, when everything was coming her way. He and she were to be married, her motion picture was almost finished, she had more money than she had ever had before in all her life, and yet sometimes Queenie appeared troubled.

"What's the matter, dear?" he would ask.

"Oh, nothing. Just fussing about the picture, that's all."

It was in regard to Zimmerman. At first she had been mildly in love with this silent, wordless, dominant showman. He was the most powerful man in the little world she moved in. His name was constantly on the lips of the people she knew. He could lift a person from obscurity to the mountain peaks of success, and if he turned against a person he could break him.

There was glamour in his money and power. His big cars, the "loud" clothes he wore, his ostentation.

To Queenie it was an enviable thing to be able to go into a hotel or a restaurant with a man whose appearance caused a ripple, and whose money could send the bell boys and hotel help scurrying in an effort to please.

At first she had been greatly flattered by his attentions. She was a lucky girl, indeed, every one told her; the great Zimmerman didn't pick up with just everything that came along.

Her rise had been due to him. She had been playing at Meyer's Lake Park, Canton, Ohio, when he had seen

her wire act. His showman's eyes quickly detected the act's possibilities; it needed dressing up; it needed more color, better music, and spot lights instead of floods—it was Coney Island material.

From second and third rate parks to Coney Island had been a tremendous jump for Miss Johnson.

At first Zimmerman had shown no personal interest in her; she was merely an "act"; she entertained the crowds, she made money for him, that was all he asked.

"Girl acts" were everywhere: high divers, the loop-the-loops, the hippodrome riders, the motor cycle girls, the contortionists, snake handlers, dancers, illusion girls, cabaret girls, exhibition swimmers, rodeo riders, mentalists; but he had no interest in them. They had set their caps in vain.

If they made money, all well and good. If they didn't, word would come to them to "drop into the office."

They knew what that meant. Zimmerman would sit at his big, littered desk, his foot usually propped up on one of the open drawers. Or sometimes he would be at the long architect's drawing table covered with blue prints and sketches, perched on a high stool, his heels hooked over the rungs, a thick, deadly looking cigar gripped in the corner of his mouth.

He would look up, study the girl silently a moment, *puff* would come a cloud of smoke.

"I sent for you because I've changed my plans. See Abie Katz about your pay check."

And then his thick, hairy hand would make a slight gesture toward his combined assistant, detail man and general office roustabout.

Many girls had tried their blandishments on the silent, disagreeable, emo-

tionless park king, but they hadn't got far. Sometimes they deliberately tried to trap him, but Zimmerman knew his way about. None of that for him.

"When I go out for a night, I don't mix up no business with it," he would say.

And then he chose for his companions people who knew nothing about him, who had never heard his name, and they would never get it from him, either. He would spend his time, and then would come back to business again—that episode in his life over and forgotten.

Zimmerman had never married. He had never had many "affairs," which was strange in a man so painfully masculine as he was. Now and then, once or twice a year, possibly, he would disappear for a few days.

And then, sitting down at his desk, when he returned, he would begin at the top of the stack of letters and telegrams which his stenographer had neatly arranged for him, ragging open with his fingers the ones he wanted to read, and carelessly tossing aside those of lesser interest. At last he would be at the bottom.

"Greenberg," he would call to the girl stenographer—work had begun again.

Down deep in Zimmerman was a feeling of reverence and respect for what might be called "the one woman." Not that he ever phrased it that way. He either liked a person or he didn't; a person either made money for him or didn't: the decision was simple. But due to some finer streak of his nature, or possibly to some early quirk in his impressionable years, he had a deep and abiding respect for an ideal which lived in a secret nook in his heart.

Sometimes he surprised Miss Green-

berg by pausing, as he shouldered his way through the Coney crowds, to fondle a child that had caught his attention. He would play with it a few minutes, shaking his thick finger at it and making queer sounds, push some passes into the hands of the mother, and then hurry on through the crowds as if to make up for lost time.

Miss Greenberg could never quite understand it. He was just naturally queer, she said.

At first Zimmerman had paid no attention to the new "wire act"; that is, except as to whether or not Queenie was a good show. Did the people like her? That was the important thing. Did it hold them late into the evening? Did she get a good hand? Did she appeal to the women? How about the kids?

Kids were becoming an increasingly important factor at summer parks. In fact, the "kiddie parks" and ride devices were, on their investments, now paying as well as the swimming pools.

Now and then he sent for Queenie Johnson and suggested changes in her act. Instead of dropping her bespangled dressing gown to the floor of the platform at the end of the act, a rack should be put up and she should throw it against that—it would give some color before she made her exit. Keep the spot light on her until she disappeared through the trapdoor, then black out.

Zimmerman began to fall in love with her slowly, that is, if one falls slowly. He was not one to look at a woman once and then become slightly mentally deranged. Too many girls had paraded their charms before the boss for him to be swept from his feet.

Most of the girls who had worked for him, or who wished to catch his eye, had gone out of their way to make

themselves agreeable to him, but Queenie hadn't. About her was a fiery spirit of independence. He could jump into the river, so far as she was concerned.

Probably this was what first attracted him to her. Here was one of the few girls who must be pursued. The others were deer who had come up and sniffed at his gun.

Something new for Zimmerman. And bit by bit he began to pay her attention. The impersonal way she treated him appealed.

Zimmerman wasn't a man to let loose of money easily. Tight as the bark on a tree, except in some ways. These were the ways that made a big display—brightly and highly colored cars, a chauffeur with enough gold braid for a Mexican brigadier general; loud clothes for himself, diamonds, extravagant hats, a bizarre walking stick—show stuff.

But when it came to a business deal he fought and bled and died over a penny. Abie Katz marveled at him, and in comparison looked upon himself as a spendthrift.

And then would come along a proposition to erect a new ride, put up a new Fun House, or a Noah's Ark, and Zimmerman would shock the sensitive Abie by the way he put his hand into the bag.

As Zimmerman's interest in Queenie ripened, he began to spend money needlessly on the act, so Abie thought. He dressed it up, brought out the full band to play for her, put her name in electric lights over the entrance to the park; a bright advertising man was called in and Queenie blossomed out on the billboards, telephone poles, and building lots as "Coney Island's Sweetheart."

At first the only impression it made

on Queenie was that the act was going well; the biggest free outdoor one-person act ever put on at Coney. And then, bit by bit, she began to take an interest in Zimmerman.

Really had a big heart, or had he? She often wondered. Sometimes he did things which shocked her; his cruelty toward any one who opposed him, or blocked his way. Some of the stories that came to her ears were not very pleasant. She did not like to think of them. And then he would do something strangely and unexpectedly fine, and her heart would go out to him.

One thing she liked was that he had never tried to get fresh, as Queenie put it. This was, indeed, a welcome relief after the way most men looked upon a wire walker—open season for them, but Queenie could take care of herself.

It was nice to hop into his car, to give word to the chauffeur, and to be whisked wherever one wished to go. The people of her world treated her with increased respect. "She had Zimmerman shining up to her. Lucky girl!"

He had never learned to dance—never had had time, he said—but now he took it up and applied himself with the relentless determination with which he undertook everything.

"It's more fun than I thought it was going to be," he said to Queenie one evening as he moved across the floor with her in his arms.

The more he saw of Queenie the more devoted he became. That vague secret ideal which he carried in his heart had now found a living counterpart.

As his love had ripened a faint shadow had floated over it. It was hardly worth noticing at first, and then it had grown bigger and blacker. It

was this rube from the sticks who didn't know a tilt-a-whirl from a scooter.

At first he had paid no attention to Chic. Queenie would send him away. But she hadn't. Instead she had grown more interested in this upstart. But Zimmerman said nothing; silently he began to watch and piece together. This gawk was stealing his girl!

Chic knew nothing of what was going on. Mr. Zimmerman was only Queenie's boss, that was all. He knew that Zimmerman acted queer, but Mr. Zimmerman was always kind of queer. Hard to get a line on. Seemed grouchy sometimes. Made him feel uneasy and guilty to talk to him. But he was pushing the top along, so everything must be all right.

Then one day the telephone rang, and the landlady shouted up the stair-

way as if trying to communicate with some one on a Zeppelin, but when Chic went down it wasn't Queenie at all. Instead it was Abie Katz.

"The chief wants you to come out to the plant to-morrow; something special, he says."

What did this mean? "The plant" was the factory where the top was being built, a short distance outside of New York. But why did Mr. Zimmerman want to see him at the plant? Never before had Zimmerman encouraged him to visit the factory; now and then Zimmerman invited the inventor to his New York office, only a step from Broadway, but here was a special message to go to the factory.

"Maybe he wants to make some change in the top," thought Chic. Of course, that was it, he decided.

Well, to-morrow he'd go.

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WHEN AUTUMN COMES

ALWAYS when autumn comes—'tis here to-day,
The moaning tree-tops rocking like a sea,
Leaves in full flight—I hide with you away
Over the fire: such is my fantasy,
Feigning you here, and take you on my knee
And kiss your eyelids as I used to do,
And marvel that so fair a thing can be—
Thus every autumn I come back to you.

Richard Le Gallienne



THE LAST ROSE

A VALIANT rose defies the autumn blight
In frail apparel of unsullied white,
Blooming benignly at the tangled edge
Of leaf and brier in the ancient hedge;
Beauty that lingers through the frosty morn
Above the keen stiletto of the thorn.

William Hamilton Hayne

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ALL-STORY

STORIES OF LOVE AND ROMANCE





"You're fired!"
Bill shouted

Velvet

*The professional fishermen of the Alaskan waters
have no room aboard for fear*

By Robert E. Pinkerton



Men swarmed off the Six Sisters like rats deserting a doomed ship. The halibut schooner was scarcely alongside the wharf in Ketchikan before they were leaping from her rail.

"Pass a line, one of you!" the skipper shouted from a pilot house window.

"Pass your own lines!" a fisherman retorted. "Or take her out in the channel and sink her."

They did not laugh or stop or even look around. Their faces were grim, and a determined stride carried them swiftly away.

But those eight fishermen halted when they gained the street level. A little man, who had been swinging

along between crutches, now balanced himself on one foot and barred their way with the sticks.

"Get back aboard and unload them fish!" he commanded in a voice startlingly loud to come from one so small.

"You could do it yourself, game leg and all, in half an hour," Ivor Johnson retorted and laughed harshly.

"Or Marty could bring 'em ashore in his boots," Axel Sorenson added. "We're through, Bull."

"Good riddance, if you're this sort!" the lame man bellowed. "But you finish the job or share nothing for the trip."

"We're sharing, all right, for lost gear," Ivor snarled.

"Lost gear, eh?" Bull Blake, the old man with the crutches roared. "You'll pay for it."

"We pay nothing," Axel Sorenson stated calmly. "You're all right, Bull. We like to fish with you. But since you been hurt we do nothing but run for shelter. If anybody pays for that gear, it's Marty. He lost it, not us."

"That's it," another supported. "Just a little breeze off the Shumagins, and Marty runs for Unga."

They started away, and the crutches no longer barred them, but were swinging down to the wharf where the Six Sisters was being worked into her berth against tide and breeze. It would have been a difficult maneuver even with a crew to pass the lines, but Marty Blake did it alone. He was running a spring line when his uncle, Bull Blake, owner of the Six Sisters, arrived.

"You're fired!" Bull shouted. "I'd 'a' done better tying her up while I was hurt. You've lost me the best crew in Ketchikan."

"All right," Marty replied easily. "Keep your shirt on."

"Shirt! It's my name I'm getting

rid of with you afloat. A Blake to run from a breeze of wind! And in the Six Sisters!"

His fierce gaze became one of pride as it swept the seventy-two feet of the schooner.

"She came up to blow heavy," Marty explained patiently. "I got in all the gear I could."

"You did not, or you'd 'a' had it all."

"I was skipper, and I decided," Marty pointed out with a touch of reproof. "She looked ugly, and there's uncharted reefs all through those waters."

Bull Blake hurled his crutches to the wharf and hopped around on one leg.

"Did you ever think of taking a chance?" he demanded savagely.

"Not an extra one. Halibut fishermen take enough chances just going out."

"A thousand dollars' worth of gear gone!"

"Now she's snug," Marty said as he methodically made fast the spring line. "It was a dirty trip, but we're back, safe as when we started. All the gear aboard ain't worth a man's life—not mine, anyhow."

The complacency of that speech left Bull Blake gasping. "Then why in hell did you ever leave port?" he demanded before his astonishment gave way to new fury.

"Back safe, eh?" and a crutch whistled past Marty's head. "Get your gear off the Six Sisters and don't come within a mile of her again. Maybe you're a Blake, but you're a damned, dirty coward, running from a summer breeze."

"I'd box your ears for that if you had two good legs," Marty observed with the first heat he had shown. "I'm not a fool taking chances, is all. You

can lose money or boats, and get more, but you've only one life, and when it's gone, it's gone. I'm hanging onto mine."

He climbed aboard, unhurriedly packed his gear, and departed. His shoulders were back and his head up as he walked along the wharf, for the charge of cowardice had left him untouched.

Marty had given much thought to that subject since the previous spring when the Six Sisters and her crew had escaped destruction by a miracle. It was his closest view of death, and he was left with a vivid realization of the grim specter's appalling finality. Recklessness became, for him, not a matter of courage, but a lack of common sense.

Then an injury to Bull Blake boosted Marty to command of the schooner and an opportunity to operate her according to this new viewpoint. Now, as he made his way streetward, he was still satisfied with it as a working theory, despite the defection of the crew, a gang of tough old-timers who had followed Bull Blake's weather-defying course through many a hazardous season.

II

MARTY picked his way automatically through repairs in the planked street, for he was still absorbed in a vain effort to find an error in his judgment during the last trip, when a heavy object came crashing down behind him. The next instant he was surrounded by coiling, writhing copper strands.

"Live wire! Live wire!" men yelled.

A piece whipped past Marty's nose. Another reached for a leg.

"Stand still!" "Run for it!" "He's

a goner!" sounded in Marty's ears, but he was only vaguely aware of the cries, and he could not follow any advice. He stood frozen. Horror had something to do with it, the horror of an end against which he could not struggle, but most of all he was stunned by the knowledge that death had struck through his careful defenses.

Marty shut his eyes. He knew he was dead. He accepted the fact, but accepted it with bewilderment and fierce resentment.

How long he stood there he did not know. He thought of a number of strange things, unrelated and unimportant, and then a grinning middle-aged man whose legs were strapped in climbers invited him to walk to safety across a plank.

Marty hesitated, and discovered that his knees were weak.

"Come on," the lineman repeated. "How's it seem to be alive?"

"I don't believe it," Marty said.

"Hardly do myself, feller. You really ain't got any right to be alive. From now on you're going on velvet. See?"

Marty thought that over for a long time after he reached his hotel. His carefully wrought philosophy had failed him, but in its place had sprung a far more fascinating theory.

"Velvet!" Every beat of his heart was a gift, a surplus, something to squander. His eyes brightened and he jumped to his feet in excitement.

"Velvet!" he exclaimed aloud. "Nothing else! It was my time then, only something slipped. I'm all through, according to the cards. The rest—just velvet."

That evening he met Ivor Johnson on the street and smashed a fist to Ivor's face in answer to the open sneer

in the fisherman's eyes. Marty was a big man, but Ivor was bigger, and the fight lasted ten minutes. When Ivor lay still at last, Marty glanced around.

"You?" he shouted at Axel Sorenson, but Axel shook his head.

Two weeks later, on November fifteenth, the halibut season closed and the fleet moved on to Seattle and the annual overhaul. Gunnar Haggstrom, owner of the Vernal, died of blood poisoning in December, and in January Marty's savings enabled him to acquire a half interest in the schooner from Gunnar's widow.

A good crew was another matter. Every halibut fisherman in town had heard of the last two trips of the Six Sisters, new boats were being built, and Marty had to content himself with what he could get. But he was fishing off the Shumagins when the season opened February fifteenth.

Halibut men still talk of that gale-swept winter. Schooners lay at La Tooche and Kodiak and Unga, in a dozen other harbors among the islands. Many thousands of dollars' worth of gear was abandoned or lost.

Not so on the Vernal. Marty Blake took her out and stayed out. If a gale prevented fishing, he put to sea and rode it through. If gear was set when the wind raised a nasty chop, Marty picked up that gear.

His crew complained. In their fear, they threatened open mutiny. Three times Marty knocked men down.

Gale followed gale, with the Vernal fishing relentlessly. The incompetence of his crew drove Marty to long hours in the pilot house. Engineers in the halibut fishery alternate with the skipper at the wheel, six hours on and six off, but Marty got little sleep.

They had been out two weeks when a lull gave him one of these rare

chances to turn in. As the gear was picked up the seas mounted. One two-mile line of baited hooks remained and great waves beat against the Vernal as she started toward the buoy, a mile to windward. The engineer worked close, lost his nerve, and fell away.

Marty came bouncing out of his stateroom, grabbed the wheel, and gave the big Diesel more fuel.

"Where's the keg?" he demanded, and when the engineer pointed in its general direction the Vernal bore away toward it.

A real gale was blowing now, what the halibut fishermen call a "breeze." Marty sighted the keg, lost it, saw it again on the crest of a great comber. He worked up into the wind and sent the schooner crashing against the walls of water. Men deserted the deck.

"Get out there!" Marty bellowed. "You pay for that gear if we don't pick it up."

That did not move them. Some were impervious to threats. To be washed off the deck meant the end, and it was winter. Three men out of the eight finally went forward and crouched in the shelter of the fo'c's'le-head.

The keg rose on a huge wave, was outlined for a moment against the sky, then came crashing down. It hit a fisherman, knocked him out, broke an arm and a shoulder. Marty himself reached from a pilot house door and grabbed the man as the wave whirled him past, then turned his attention to getting in the gear.

Skill counted then, drawing aboard two miles of thin line with hundreds of pounds of struggling halibut on the hooks. Men deserted the winch as the big waves threatened, and were driven back with curses.

An instant's inattention at the wheel,

the misjudgment of a wave, too much pressure on the fuel lever, and the line would snap. Marty got it all, saw the fish dressed and beneath the hatch.

"That's fishing!" he shouted exultantly when all was snug forward. "Now for a doctor!"

He ran for Kodiak, and found the harbor jammed with halibut schooners. The injured man was carried ashore, a cod fisherman induced to take his place, and in two hours the Vernal was off again, fighting past the offshore dangers to the open gulf.

III

A WEEK later, when Marty brought his vessel into Ketchikan, the crew unloaded, took their rich shares and quit in a body. That is, all except the cod fisherman, Gus Hagen.

"Two hundred dollars for a week's work ain't so bad," he said. "I like a driver."

The others, remembering how Marty had picked up the keg, saw it differently, and wherever fishermen gathered in Ketchikan they justified their desertion of the Vernal.

"He's crazy," it was stated with conviction. "He may get fish, but what good does your share do you if you don't get back? Plain crazy, the way he handles a boat."

"Nothing crazy about the six hundred dollars each of you made in three weeks," more seasoned halibut men retorted, and those who were not satisfied with their berths decided to keep an eye on the Vernal.

This interest enabled Marty to get a new crew, although half of them left after the second trip. The gales had not abated, and fishing "was plain hell," as Gus Hagen asserted.

"It ain't the weather," declared those who quit. "It's Marty. He's

mad, plain mad. Don't seem to have sense enough to be afraid."

"Mad Marty" all Ketchikan called him by summer, and Ketchikan thought it understood. Only one other schooner was bringing in as many fish as the Vernal, and that was Bull Blake's Six Sisters. Stem and stem, they led the race for high boat in the fleet, and the water front chuckled at what it considered the result of Bull calling his nephew a coward.

Whatever the gossip in port or the weather out to the westward, Marty surveyed it all with a feeling that he was looking down on men, boats, sea and wharves from the truck of his foremast. Life was a marvelous thing when you had only its surplus to spend, and Marty spent it riotously.

"Velvet!" he laughed when the Vernal reeled from the terrific blows of the sea. "Velvet!" he shouted when gear was still out and it seemed madness to attempt to take it in.

He used the word often, in exclamations that puzzled his fishermen, in defiant bellows torn from his lips by the icy fingers of a gale, in bursts of merriment when a dark night found them too close inshore and the white teeth of Alaska's outlying dangers flashed across the bow.

In the beginning Marty cared little about the money the Vernal was making. That, in his mind, was only a by-product of this reckless game in which he wagered the surplus of his life. By midsummer he knew that he and his uncle led all the fleet. His fishermen—he had a crack crew now—talked of it constantly, and were eager for leadership. Everywhere Marty went he heard the names of the two schooners coupled.

And thus, as the Vernal went out into the gulf time after time, as gales

were conquered and the hold crammed again and again, the game itself, that mad, reckless, implacable game the halibut fishermen play, began to find a foothold in Marty's thoughts. "Velvet!" burst less frequently from his lips. He found himself staring in astonishment at his bank balance. A strange, warm glow swept over him one day when a ship chandler introduced him to a man from the States as "the leading skipper of the halibut fleet."

October came, twelve months after that last disastrous trip in the Six Sisters. The Vernal departed for the westward with an impatient crew, for Bull Blake's men were leading. Marty watched the grim faces of his fishermen, and caught snatches of their sullen comments.

"What's the trouble?" he laughed. "Afraid the Six Sisters will get all the fish?"

"What's so funny in it?" Gus Hagen demanded. "Don't you care if that runt with the big voice beats you out?"

Marty considered. It was the first time the rivalry had been put so plainly. "We've done fairly well," he countered.

"Well!" Gus snorted. "We've got a chance to come in high boat this season, and we will if you don't let a man who has called you a coward beat you."

Marty's eyes twinkled as he looked at the crew. They were *skookum* fishermen all, and not one had ever complained. It was significant of his thoughts that he put the question to them.

"You fellows stand for anything?" he asked. "Fall gales coming on."

"Anything to get fish!" Gus retorted.

"Lock that governor wide open,"

Marty grinned at the engineer. "We're going somewheres."

IV

THE Vernal fished every minute she was on the banks, something no other schooner out there dared to do. There were times when even Gus Hagen believed they could not pick up all the gear they had out. Not that he was afraid. To him the Vernal was as safe as Cape St. Elias. He simply did not believe it possible for any combination of man and boat to win against such conditions.

Yet Marty Blake did win. Those wise old fishermen watching from amidships, ready to pick up the keg, knew every move he was making up there in the pilot house, and they swore oaths flattened by awe when he succeeded.

"Never saw anything to beat him," Gus said when they were headed back to Ketchikan with a full load.

"He's built into the boat," another explained. "It happens sometimes."

But they reached port to find the Six Sisters low in the water at the wharf and Bull Blake bellowing at each second's delay in the unloading.

"No copper showing," one of Marty's men whispered. "The old Bull's beat us."

But they raced through the unloading, never went ashore, took on oil and ice and were away again, two hours behind the Six Sisters. Gus Hagen entered the pilot house to find Marty tapping the barometer.

"Sou'east," the skipper said. "We'll stay inside to Cape Spencer."

"Maybe she'll blow out by then," Gus suggested.

"Not this one."

They caught sight of the Six Sisters the next day. The Gulf of Alaska

was smoking with spindrift and the two schooners rolled their rails far under as they tore away before the gale. Neither should have been out there, at least should not have turned tail to that kind of sea, but the fishing banks lay to the westward and only eighteen days remained before the end of the season.

"We'd better heave to," Gus Hagen said when he entered the pilot house. "One of those big ones will poop us."

Marty did not answer. He did not even think of that surplus of life which was his to squander. He knew only that he had an opportunity to out-chance Bull Blake.

Hours passed, and still the Six Sisters hung on. Marty was at the Vernal's wheel, for it took a master hand to fight those terrific yaws when the big seas crowded up beneath the stern. Gus Hagen remained in the pilot house, but even his ruthless spirit failed to survive. He glanced at Marty occasionally with troubled eyes.

"There he comes!" Marty shouted exultingly in mid afternoon. "The Bull's quit!"

The Vernal went tearing on and soon passed the Six Sisters, hove to. Marty held his whistle cord down, although he knew the sound would not carry across the gale.

"You've made him quit," Gus said without trying to hide the pleading note in his voice.

"Sure!" Marty said. "But we don't."

They got it an hour later, a great sea that mounted swiftly behind them, curled over and leaped at the tiny, fleeing vessel. Its cruel fingers snatched away the two nested dories and the six-inch timbers that supported them. It ripped a covering board off the top of the pilot house on the starboard

side, and carried away the hatch over the after cabin.

For a long, long moment the Vernal lay groaning in the welter of the breaking sea. She shivered, tried valiantly to shake herself free, yawed until it seemed that she would surely swing broadside and turn over. Gus Hagen's face was white.

"Better say 'Velvet'!" he called, but Marty did not hear.

He was fighting in a way he had never fought before. It was as if his sweetheart had been insulted. He gave no thought to the surplus of life that was his to squander, even to the lives of the eight other men aboard the Vernal. He only knew that his beloved schooner was attacked and that he must take her through.

Marty fought all that afternoon and all night, fought until the storm died and he was on the banks, and even while the great seas were still running, he started setting out gear.

Seventeen days! Each second was counted by those fishermen. Baiting, dressing, icing, taking in endless skates of gear, scornful of weather, unwitting of the bitter winds that swept down from the great glaciers to the north, nine men fought the sea and the fish as if they were implacable enemies.

They capped months of terrific toil with a mad burst of energy that sent them into their berths all-standing, that jerked them out at a touch on the shoulder. They threw overboard the schedule of twelve hours on and six off, and worked until they could remain awake no longer.

The Vernal sank lower in the water. Fish came overside in a stream, it seemed. Marty watched exultantly from a pilot house window. Heavy lids drooped over gleaming eyes, and

were lifted for a challenging glare across the gray wastes.

V

WITH two days remaining, another southeast gale began, the first of the real winter storms. A lee shore was not far away, dreaded Cape St. Elias lay close at hand, but Marty only glanced at the chart and set out more gear.

Schooners passed them, homeward bound for the season, fighting their way into the growing gale, and the Vernal fished. The last day of the season they were alone, and hanging on with difficulty. The winch pulled in the last of the gear and men glanced up at the pilot house. They were ready to quit, although there was time to make another set.

Their attitude maddened Marty. His gaze swept the sea as if challenging it, his lips parted to issue the order to run out another line, when he saw the familiar bare poles of a halibut schooner to leeward.

Marty beckoned Gus Hagen and together they watched.

"No place to be hove to," the skipper muttered. "She's close in."

"Maybe she's in trouble."

Marty answered by swinging the wheel over and gripping the fuel lever. The Vernal went swinging off with the wind.

"There's her distress signal!" Gus shouted.

"Tell the boys to run a cable out the hawse pipes and around to the stern for towing," Marty ordered.

The crew knew what was up now. The engineer came in and picked up the glasses.

"Six Sisters," he reported.

"What!" Marty roared.

"Only one that would be left. I'd

know her anywhere. And"—he stared through the glasses again when they rose to a crest—"she's in among a mess of reefs now."

It was a mad thing to do, going in there after her, and the sort of unreasoning thing from which seamen seldom flinch. But more than courage was essential. Skill and daring were equally important if the Six Sisters and her men were to be saved, and Marty Blake showed that he had all three requirements.

Only once did he falter. He had dodged two reefs and was working up into the wind alongside the other schooner when he opened the pilot house door.

"How about it?" he shouted to his uncle. "You told me never to come within a mile of your old tub."

"You come any closer and you'll sink us," Bull Blake roared back. "Quit your damned fooling and get us a line."

"I got no dories."

Marty knew from the beginning that he would have to work near enough to heave a line, and it was a ticklish proposition.

"He'll do it," one of his fishermen said. "I told you he was built into this boat."

Marty did, and he towed the Six Sisters into Ketchikan.

"Send in your salvage bill," Bull Blake growled when both schooners were tied up. "I was done for, with a busted crankshaft."

"Salvage!" Marty laughed. "I've got it."

"I've heard you were mad."

"Maybe so, but no money'd pay me like watching your face while we towed you in. The Vernal's got a nice stern, hasn't she?"

"I'll admit it," Bull said readily.

"It looked good to me every foot of the way, and if it 'll add anything, I'll say that I never saw the man who could 'a' worked in there and got us out, let alone one who'd take the chance."

Marty looked at the two schooners. The Vernal lay low in the water, no copper showing. The Six Sisters rode high.

"Oh, you beat us on the season," his uncle said when he saw the glance. "Wish you'd fished as well for me. What's happened to you, anyhow?"

"Velvet!" Marty said, and turned streetward. It was the same wharf where he had tied up the Six Sisters the year before, and as he mounted to the planked thoroughfare he saw a man about to climb a pole.

"Safe to pass here?" Marty asked and laughed.

The lineman looked around with a puzzled expression, and then a slow smile spread across his face and his eyes twinkled.

"I remember you," he chuckled. "Last year, eh?"

"When the pole fell, and all those wires."

"Yeh. Pretty scared, weren't you? I've laughed many a time since."

"Laughed!" Marty repeated. "What at?"

"The way you looked. I thought

maybe it would save your face if I told you those wires were hot."

Marty stared.

"You say—you—mean—" he stammered. "There wasn't any juice in 'em?"

"Nary a drop. We had to turn off the current for that job."

Still Marty Blake stared. He could not at once adjust himself to this revelation. Not even when he stood there surrounded by the coiling copper strands had he felt so helpless.

And then suddenly he laughed. He laughed and leaped forward and grabbed the lineman's arm.

"You come with me," he commanded, and dragged him across the street and into a tailor shop.

"Say!" he shouted. "What's the best suit of clothes you got?"

The tailor had grown rich off halibut fishermen.

"Hundred and thirty," he said.

"Fine!" Marty cried. "Measure this man and give him the best you have. Send me the bill, and see that it's a high class job or you'll have me piling down your throat. Blake's my name, off the Vernal—Marty Blake."

"Mad Marty!" the tailor blurted out.

"Sure, that's it!" Marty acknowledged and laughed again as he went out.



ON A LADY PATCH

THAT little patch upon your face
 Would seem a foil to one less fair;
 On you it hides a charming grace,
 And you, in pity, placed it there.

Anonymous



The flood swept both constable and miner down the cliff

The Smuggler's Crown

There was more than tin in the ancient shafts of the famous Wheal Zion Mine

By Richard Howells Watkins



ON the cliff, twelve feet above the sea's high-water mark, a small man braced himself with his toes on a narrow, sloping ledge of rock. With a hammer and drill he pecked steadily at the face of the precipice.

Above the man's bent shoulders loomed the enormous bulk of Penzion Head, that great mass of granite which towers so high above the neighboring headlands of the north Cornish coast.

It is a welcome beacon, that great head, to sea-weary ships steaming for the shelter of the Bristol Channel, and it is the better marked by the gaunt skeleton of a building of granite blocks that surmounts its summit.

This stone ruin is an engine house. Once its smoking chimney proclaimed abroad the industry beneath it; now it stands as a headstone to mark the site of drowned, abandoned mine shafts. For in Penzion Head is that most famous of Cornish tin mines, the Wheal

Zion. Tradition says that Phœnician galleys carried to Tyre tin from Wheal Zion. The Celtic name of the promontory itself—"Headland of the Jews"—is pointed out as proof of ancient Semitic connections.

For two generations man had let Penzion Head stand unvexed by the tickle of "boryers" and the thud of black powder blasts. Now this lone man, Hugh Tredeen, had come to disturb its peace.

The quick, easy twist of the drill in his left hand, the hard, square blow of the sledge in his right, gave sure indication that Hugh Tredeen had made blast holes by hand before this. As a matter of fact, in the last twenty years this small, square-shouldered Cornishman had drilled the bed rock of four continents; and while he had drilled he had dreamed of that marvelous headland of Penzion, wherein Tredeens past number in centuries past number had bored in search of tin.

At length his dream had come true. He had actually come back from his last job, in a Utah copper mine, to the spot hallowed by the tales of his father and his grandfather. They were two of the army of Cornish miners who followed metal around the world when the Cornish mines closed down. Hugh had been ten years old when he left Penzion Head with them, but his own vague recollections of the headland had been vividly and persistently reinforced by the talk of his elders. Both men had planned to return to Wheal Zion; but his father was buried in New Zealand, his grandfather in Alaska.

Hugh finished his hole, tamped down his charge, glanced down the cliff at the footholds he must use to reach the beach, and lit the fuse. An instant later he climbed down to the wet sands.

The blast was not a heavy one. Indeed, the dull report seemed to mock the miner's precautions.

The havoc seemed more than commensurate with the explosive force he had applied. One big mass of granite, weighing perhaps a ton, had been dislodged and had fallen to the beach.

"That shot should ha' holed through," Hugh Tredeen muttered.

He studied the wall of the cliff. At the spot where he had drilled, the explosion had revealed more plainly a roughly oblong hole.

He climbed nimbly up to his ledge. The breach in the cliff plainly revealed itself as the mouth of a tunnel.

"Another will put her through," he decided.

With his pick he was testing out the solidity of the detritus remaining when a voice from below halted him.

"'Ere! You vandal! Come down!"

In the course of a rather rough life Hugh Tredeen had been called many things, but never a vandal. He turned with pick poised, and looked down.

On the sands below him stood a man in a silk hat—a tall, thin man, no more than middle-aged. His face was white, almost wizened—the face of a shaved monkey, so Hugh Tredeen thought.

"Come down!" the man repeated with increasing asperity. "Come down, you wrecker! I'll 'ave you taken in charge! I've been watching you, sir—watching you for several days on this headland! And now you're blasting—destroying the cliff and scaring visitors away. Come down!"

To all this Hugh Tredeen had a ready answer. He whipped out a matchbox, lit a match, and poked it against the innocent face of the cliff.

"Blast!" he bellowed, and flattened himself against the granite. "Blast!"

The man in the silk hat spun around

as if a bullet had hit him. His varnished leather boots dug into the wet sand and sent it spurting high. The next instant he had vanished around a shoulder of the headland.

But he did not stop there. The miner's keen ears heard the sounds of rapidly displaced sand continue and finally die away. He laughed aloud, and then his face clouded over in one of those rapid changes of mood that mark a Cornishman.

"The mayor of St. Simon, as I was born in—that man!" muttered Tredeen. His voice held humiliation. "Blackburn! A furrin name and a monkey face! No more Cornish than London Bridge, that one. Scaring visitors! Was it tin or trippers that made Cornwall?"

He swung his pickax with more vigor, as if he were dissecting Mr. Blackburn. When he drew the pick out of the crumbling stone, the hole he had made filled up instantly with water. He grunted at this sign and picked away more carefully after that.

"Hotel keeper! An' ordering a Tredeen off Penzion, as us ha' mined since the old men's time! The slug!"

Truly, things had changed in Cornwall since his father's day, and had changed for the worse. St. Simon, the village at the foot of the cliffs, where all men had been fishermen, or miners, or both, was now what they called a watering place. Hotels, boarding houses, and even villas rose in superior ranks above the slate roofs of the whitewashed stone cottages. The mayor was a cockney hotel keeper, who wore a high hat as boldly as if he had been an old-time mine captain.

II

THE steady crunch of unhurried feet on the wet sand below aroused

Tredeen from his work. The mayor of St. Simon was coming back, then.

Hugh looked down; but it was not the small, wrinkled visage of the mayor that peered up at him. It was a square, solid face, mounted on a square, solid body. The face was surmounted by a blue helmet, and the body was clothed in a blue uniform.

This was no mayor; this was an officer of the Cornwall Constabulary. By the set of his broad shoulders—broader than Hugh Tredeen's, those shoulders—this man's fathers had been miners of tin, too.

"Come down!" commanded the constable, with stern dignity. "Are 'ee daring to insult the mayor of St. Simon? Who gave 'ee leave to open up that old adit?"

Hugh Tredeen's black eyes swept over the uniform again—this time slightly.

"Is Cornwall become part of London, that Cornishmen take orders from cockneys?" he inquired. "Here's one that doesn't, my lad."

The sober reserve of the constable yielded to a flush of anger. He stepped quickly to the base of the cliff.

"I've warned 'ee!" he snapped.

"Send the monkey up after me," Hugh Tredeen advised, jerking a finger in the direction of the vanished mayor.

Constable Porth grinned spontaneously, and then suppressed the smile with swift severity.

"You down or I up!" he shouted, and his eyes were already seeking hand holds in the granite.

Hugh Tredeen knelt on his ledge and lowered the handle of his pick down the side of the cliff.

"Don't 'ee fall, man," he warned in grinning solicitude.

The constable was already climbing,

and climbing fast for so heavy a man. His eyes, as black as Tredeen's, shot glints of wrath up the cliff.

"Don't 'ee mock my speech!" he shouted. "We'll ha' no furriners coming to Cornwall to make figures of fun of we!"

Ignoring the pick, he leaped upon the ledge as he spoke; but now Hugh Tredeen was angry—far more angry than the constable.

"Furriner!" he rasped, shaking a clenched fist. "Do 'ee call me furriner? My fathers worked in Wheal Zion before 'ee had any fathers! You're the furriner, uniform, if 'ee never heard of the Tredeens of St. Simon!"

"Tredeen!" said Porth. He confronted Hugh across the excavation the miner had made. "Tredeens—I ha' heard o' Tredeens." He wrinkled his brow in simulation of deep thought. "Was there not a Tredeen well known in these parts in the time of the old men—Jan Tredeen—him they called the King of Penzion Cove?"

"Aye!" replied Hugh proudly. "After hundreds of years Cornwall still calls to mind Jan Tredeen, the King of Penzion Cove."

"He was a bit of a smuggler, as well as miner, if I call the man to mind proper," Constable Porth said, still reflectively.

"That he was," said Hugh Tredeen. He gestured upward. "He planted a cannon on this very head, to keep the cutter away when a landing of French brandy was made in Penzion Cove. In days when they starved elsewhere in Cornwall he kept food in the mouths of his people. He had no more love of uniforms than I have."

Constable Porth nodded again, most amiably, despite Tredeen's taunt.

"It was him his followers gave a

crown to, made out of white tin, as a sort of sign."

"Aye!" Tredeen tapped the granite wall with his pick and smiled upon his fellow Cornishman. "There was more than tin to be had out of this mine when the King of Penzion Cove held sway," he said proudly. "Ankers of brandy and yards of lace; and the tinstone of Jan Tredeen and his band never went to be coined with the king's stamp and taxed out of all its value. It went to France direct, to pay for the brandy. No riding officer or exciseman ever dared set foot in the shafts or level o' Wheal Zion. 'Twasn't healthy for uniforms."

"A great man, Jan Tredeen of the tin crown," Constable Porth agreed softly. He knit his brow once again and asked innocently: "And what became of he?"

That abrupt question halted Hugh Tredeen's eulogy abruptly. He stared into the policeman's eyes and saw therein a hint of the trap he had fallen into.

Constable Porth spoke on, deliberately and with infinite relish.

"The King of Penzion Cove wouldn't be the old smuggler I call to mind," he said; "him that was surprised by the king's soldiers one dark night when the brandy was coming ashore in the gigs, and fled the country in the French lugger, while many of his men were killed on the beach? That would never be he, would it? Jan Tredeen would never ha' fled from uniform, would he?"

The blood boiled into Hugh Tredeen's face. He had not forgotten—he had merely overlooked—the inglorious end that tradition attributed to the King of Penzion Cove.

"Jan Tredeen disappeared during a run of brandy, when the riding officer

led the dragoons down on 'em," he said hoarsely. "He fought—he was wounded—maybe murdered and flung in the sea. Whoever says he left his people in the lurch, lies—lies, I say!"

"Must ha' been plenty of liars in that day, then, for the old tale says he fled to France," Porth commented tranquilly. "Are 'ee coming down now, heir apparent?"

"Be damned!"

Hugh Tredeen shouted the words and drove his pick with all his furious might into the rubble of water-soaked granite. The blow was answered by a gush of red water from within the cliff.

The gush swelled instantly to a torrent. The bowlders and sand that blocked the mouth of the tunnel boiled violently, and then were swept away.

The ever increasing flood, raging forth to freedom, swept both constable and miner from the shelf of rock and washed them down the cliff. Stunned, half drowned, they were flung upon the wet sands below.

Hugh Tredeen was the first to struggle to his feet. He laid hold of the dazed, strangling constable by the shoulders and dragged him bodily from the grip of the cascade. The red water of Penzion Head was rushing turbulently across the beach and meeting the green water of the sea. There was no sign of slackening in the outburst, for it was draining all the flooded galleries of the mine.

Porth did not long remain supine. Even as Tredeen hauled him clear of the torrent, the constable stretched out long arms to seize the man who had defied him.

Tredeen wrenched himself away. He swung his fists through the air in menacing sweeps as Porth climbed to his knees.

"I'm down!" he shouted. "And so are 'ee, it seems! 'Twill be down further, and harder, next time 'ee crosses me!"

"That 'll be now!" Porth thundered, and lurched to his feet. He clawed at the red mud in his eyes and then stretched out quick, seeking hands. "In the name of the law—"

Hugh Tredeen side-stepped the constable and retrieved his pick from the flood. Running a few steps along the cliff, he leaped up to the shelving, uncertain surface of a ledge cut out of the rock by human hands. This ledge offered a tortuous and perilous passage to the top of the headland. The King of Penzion Cove and many another smuggler had made good use of it as a link between beach and head.

"Take heed!" Tredeen shouted, pausing on the narrow path. "Maybe you and your monkey mayor ha' monkeyed with a free-setting tributer!"

He ran on up the ledge. In Jan Tredeen's time laden mules were led up that precipitous course, but now Hugh found places where erosion had almost cut it away. Toward the top he went more slowly, and found time to look over at Constable Porth.

The policeman was not pursuing. He was walking back along the beach toward St. Simon. His uniform was sodden, clinging, and more red than blue, but he was walking steadily—even purposefully.

III

At the summit Hugh Tredeen paused to pull off his flannel shirt and wring it out.

It did not occur to him to abandon Wheal Zion as a result of this trifling fracas. More than a cockney mayor and a uniform was needed to make him quit the ancient mine in which his

family's men folk past recollection had labored for bread.

"I'll see more of that uniform, but he'll come as a Cornishman, not as a Cornish constable," Hugh predicted. "He's got fists at the end of his arms, that one, and he'll come to me, not to a magistrate."

He made his way briskly to the roofless ruin of the engine house. Here, with the aid of a few boards and some tarred paper, he had made himself a tolerable shelter and a store for his tools and scanty provisions.

Sitting down on the flowering turf, he ate a meat patty for his dinner and washed it down with beer.

This small man had a labor of Hercules to perform. Upon the great broad top of Penzion Head there were the shafts, pits, and trenches left by the tanners of twenty—some say thirty—centuries. He, a solitary man, though a Tredeen, must open up one after another of the tumbled-in shafts until he struck one that gave promise of tinstone in the shallow levels near the surface.

The lode, indeed, would surely be gutted out, but there might be stringers—narrow veins of ore—branching out into the sides of the workings. The price of tin in the modern world made these stringers, disregarded in the old days, well worth an energetic man's time. Later—this was the very crux of Tredeen's dream—pumps would clank again, and men with machinery would descend below the level of the sea, to strike deeper and deeper into the riches of Wheal Zion.

He had hoped that the shallower workings would be dry; but his descent on a swaying rope ladder into the unrevealing darkness of a shaft had been halted by water, almost before it had been begun. Water was an enemy

that he could tackle only from below; so he had opened—despite Constable Porth—one of the adits in the cliff. If there was any connection between the shaft and the adit, the water would drain out, perhaps almost to the level of the sea. If it did not drain, then he could clear either a new shaft or a new adit.

Now, with a carbide lamp slung around his shoulder, he descended again into the shaft. He found that the water had indeed lowered. From the blackness beneath there came a sound of dripping, and sometimes, though he could not be sure, he thought he heard a distant gurgle. The imprisoned water that had collected through the years was still rushing forth into daylight by the vent he had made below.

To the limit of his rope ladder he descended. He found no break in the shaft, no place where a level opened up a black path for his feet. The sides of the shaft were "country" rock; his carbide lamp showed him no sign of tinstone. Well beyond a safe drop from the ladder, however, there was a hollow in one side of the shaft that might be the opening of a level or nothing at all. He could not tell.

He went back to the top of the shaft. He must lengthen his rope ladder a trifle or supplement it with one of his ladders of wood.

As he drew near the stronger light of day, he turned out his lamp. His head came out of the shaft and his eyes fell upon the pile of bowlders to which he had anchored his ropes. Constable Porth was standing there with his foot on one of the stones. An electric bull's-eye lantern hung suspended on his huge chest.

He surveyed Hugh Tredeen grimly, without speaking.

"Welcome!" said the miner defiantly.

He swung himself easily out of the shaft. He smiled upon Porth, but warily kept his eyes upon the black eyes of his enemy.

The two men were confronting each other on a small circular patch of ground around the mouth of the shaft. They were hedged in by a high wall of bowlders that had been raised to prevent children and grazing animals from tumbling into the incompletely blocked mine. The crumbling, caving sides of the shaft now encroached upon the scant space inside the wall.

Porth had changed his soiled, wet uniform for one that was obviously his dress attire. He carried no truncheon. His eyes were steady, and there was no trace of anger in his face, though there was plenty of resolution.

"I knowed the heir apparent would be looking over his kingdom like," he said, jerking a finger downward in a gesture that might have indicated either the mine or hell.

"Better a devil than manservant to a monkey," Tredeen flashed.

Porth neglected to hear this.

"I ha' business with 'ee," he said.

"My orders are to bring 'ee to the mayor to show your lease, if lease 'ee have."

"Yes?"

"The matter of the holing into that house of water and fair drowning I is a matter I'll settle with 'ee up here in a private way—without uniform. That's between we."

"That's Cornish," Hugh Tredeen said, and clinched his hands invitingly.

"But first, while 'ee are still pretty in the face, the mayor must see your papers. He'll know if they're right after he's written to the lord of the mineral rights. Meanwhile you'll de-

face no cliffs and fire no blasts. Come along!"

"Since when did a free-setting tributer take orders from a mayor?" inquired the miner, grinning into the constable's face.

"Have done with talk," Porth growled. "If 'ee don't come peaceable, I'll bring 'ee under arrest. I obey my orders."

"Make me come!" invited Tredeen in a rush of anger.

In his pocket, sodden but still valid, he had his papers, but he would never produce them for the inspection of a sneaking, nose foreigner.

Porth tapped his chin with his finger and flicked a thread off his new blue coat. Then, with the suddenness of a startled cat, he dropped into a crouch and leaped across the corner of the shaft. His fingers, closing like the snap of a trap, closed empty, for Tredeen had instantly flung himself against the wall. Before Porth could collect himself, the miner's fist had landed with a solid smack upon his jaw. Porth grunted, shook his head, and leaped in again, his arms clutching.

Disregarding the yawning shaft at their feet, the two men raced, dodged, and jumped around the narrow circle of shelving earth. Tredeen fled, but whirled time after time in his flight to send his fists like quick, shrewd hammer blows against the other man's head.

Porth, far heavier and not so fast, had but one idea—to get his arms around Tredeen. To accomplish that aim he took all the miner's punishment with hands still clutching, not clinched. Again and again he leaped the pit, even alighting on the ragged, crumbling side to attain his one objective; but always he failed.

Tredeed was uncatchable. In a fury of defiance he courted capture to land blows on Porth. He took greater chances with that black, unfathomable pit than did the constable, and he wasted breath recklessly on taunts and laughter. He made no effort to scale the inclosing wall and thus escape; he preferred to tantalize and shame his laboring enemy.

"Ye can't best a Tredeen on Penzion Head, man!" he shouted, dancing this way and that, with the full width of the shaft between them. "'Tis our home—our kingdom! Run faster! Go back for a gun!"

He bent, scooped up a bit of granite, and held it out to Porth, who was moving steadily around the edge of the shaft toward him.

"Scat me with that!" Tredeen advised, retreating and advancing in a quick, bewildering jig.

As the constable came within touching distance of him, the miner gathered himself together and leaped suddenly across the edge of the shaft, to pass him. At that same instant Porth had jumped also, and in the opposite direction. The bodies of the two men met over the shaft with a crash. The constable's heavier weight prevailed; both men were flung, even as they fell, back against the side toward which he had leaped.

Porth's clutching arms found some sort of grip upon the edge of the pit; his frantic, pawing feet found a scanty hold upon the shelving side. The shock of the collision had spun Tredeen around, and he dropped far below the edge. One outstretched foot hooked in a rung of the rope ladder, and he was jerked, head downward, to a halt. His body, held by the power of one bent knee, swung in the shaft. The lamp, tight fastened to him, hit him

violently in the face.

Agile as a monkey, undazed by all this, he twisted and writhed upward, grasped the ropes, and started swarming up the ladder.

Porth, after a long moment of clawing and slipping, had saved himself from imminent death. His face, which had been so red, had gone white at his peril, and now was purple. For the first time he was madly enraged, and his wrath was a terrible thing to see. He bent down and peered at the man below.

"Tried to murder I!" He roared the accusation at Tredeen. "I'll break 'ee in two pieces!"

His arms spread out, enormous, menacing, ready to infold the small man as he came to the mouth of the pit; but Hugh Tredeen ducked back and laughed his defiance.

"Come down and get me!" he invited. "I'll give 'ee a taste o' mine life!"

He pelted down the rope ladder as if it were endless. Porth could not know that it swung free in a void at the lower end.

"I'll get 'ee!" Porth roared down.

The gleam of the electric flash light he carried on his chest suddenly shone forth. The man was coming down the ladder. Tredeen could feel it tremble under his weight.

Quickly, with a leg and arm caught in the swaying ladder, the miner lighted his own carbide lamp. By turning it upward he could blind Porth and prevent him from seeing the situation below; but since the constable was descending steadily, not attempting to see, this move, he saw, was futile.

In desperation he turned the lamp sidewise, searching the walls of the shaft for some means of continuing his retreat. Nothing but the blank

walls of the shaft was revealed. He studied the hollow in the shaft, well below the limit of the ladder, which he had thought on his first descent might be the first level. It was impossible to tell just what it was—but Porth was behind him. All the hot blood in his veins urged him to avoid capture, to defeat his raging enemy, at any cost.

Letting the lamp swing on its strap, he lowered himself until he hung by one arm. With the other he focused the lamp on the hollow. The rays now gave more indication that it was a level.

It was enough. Holding on again with both hands, Tredeen swung—and released his hold. It was an easier jump than he had expected. His feet landed on the ledge, and he had more than enough impetus to swing his body forward, out of the black shaft.

IV

Nor until then did Tredeen realize what he had done. He had cut himself off completely from his rope ladder. Unless this level had sloping, not sheer descents to the adit far below through which the water was escaping, he was imprisoned in the mine. A man cannot descend shafts without ladders.

On the other hand, Porth was persistent, and there was more than a chance that he would go back to St. Simon for more rope, and perhaps men, to help him capture his enemy. Then Tredeen might escape somehow through the shaft.

Hugh looked up the shaft, toward the beam of yellow radiance that came from the flash light on Porth's chest.

"Good-by to you!" he taunted. "The ladder's too short for 'ee, though 'twas long enough for a miner. Go

fetch more uniforms and get me later—if 'ee can!"

Porth did not answer, but the light was steadily descending the shaft.

Tredeen turned away and flashed his own lamp along the level. The tunnel was less than six feet high, and wide enough for a man to handle a wheelbarrow. It led in a general direction toward the face of the cliff.

With a watchful eye toward the floor, the miner moved along. The beam of the carbide lamp, cutting a vivid swath in the blackness, showed him that the level was an ancient one. By sweat and muscle, without the aid of powder, men—his own fathers, perhaps—made it by riving the tinstone from the rock.

The impenetrable blackness through which he had passed was suddenly dispelled by a fleck of yellow light. Tredeen blinked. His own light was trained upon the stope; no reflection of its rays on a bit of quartz could have caused that glint.

Again came a flicker of light. The hair on Tredeen's head prickled and turned his scalp cold. There could be no source of light in that deserted mine save his own lamp. He pulled off his cap and smothered the lamp in it.

Still he caught glimpses of light, and now he recognized these as vagrant reflections from crystalline bits of rock in the granite walls.

He listened intently, without breathing. To his ears there came a quick, repeated swashing—the sound of running feet in the silt.

"Porth!" he muttered. "He jumped!"

Only then did he realize the intensity of the constable's determination to get him. To pursue him, Porth had risked a fall to unfathomable depths; and now he was coming—fast.

Into Hugh Tredeen's mind there flashed a picture of himself in the county jail—or worse. Assaulting a policeman was a crime in any country, and he knew well how serious a crime it was in England. Porth would have no mercy now. He might charge attempted murder.

Tredeed's dream of working Wheal Zion was going glimmering, as had his father's and his grandfather's before him. A prison, not a mine, was ahead of him, and none but himself could understand how terrible a thing that was for him to face.

"Never!" he muttered. "Never!"

Porth would keep coming—while he was alive. To escape from the temptation that leaped into Tredeen's mind, he clambered up the stope. The chance of hiding from a man with a light was remote, but Tredeen wanted above all to keep away from Porth—at least until he had himself more in hand. That much sense he still retained.

On hands and knees, protecting his lamp as best he could, he ascended. He scrambled above the recent level of the water into a region where the detritus was quite dry. It slid downward under him, but he climbed faster than he slipped. The stope narrowed, and became so small that he could barely crawl. Was his attempt at escape to end in a granite wall?

Suddenly there was light ahead of him—a light that was not the light of his lamp. He wormed on. With stunning surprise he found that it was daylight—daylight here in the depths of a mine! Then he remembered that the level had run toward the cliff.

He scrambled toward the light, and suddenly the stope opened up wide in front of him. He found himself staring at the source of daylight—a small, jagged hole in the granite, which

showed him the blue of the sky.

He got to his feet and leaped toward it across a sort of chamber. His eyes were wet and his sight blurred by the blaze of daylight as he peered out; but he saw the sea and the cliff below. Ten feet below the hole, in plain sight, was a bit of the zigzagging smugglers' path that he had followed upward that day.

"Safe!" he muttered. "I'll make for Plymouth."

V

SUDDENLY Tredeen became aware that he was standing on something that was not rock. He turned his lamp toward the dim floor. All about his feet were crushed and scattered bones—big bones. The rays of the light fell suddenly upon a skull. It was the skull of a man. He was in a charnel house!

Startled, he leaped aside. His feet struck something solid, and he fell.

His lamp, held high with the miner's instinct to save it at all cost, was not broken. As he scrambled to his feet, Hugh turned its rays all about him.

This place in which he stood was no casual cavity in the earth left by the removal of tin ore; it was a shaped and level-floored chamber. There were three skulls among the bones below the hole in the cliff. The thing he had fallen over was a pile of ingots of tin. In another corner were the scattered staves of a tub, and beside the skeletons that his feet had disturbed was a long, rusty rod and the other remains of a flintlock musket. Among the bones lay a cutlass, two other swords exactly alike, and various metal accouterments.

He bent closer, forgetting that he was a fugitive close pursued. There on the floor, not far from one of the skulls, was another metal object—a

thing that looked grotesquely like a rude crown.

"By God, it is a crown!" Hugh Tredeen muttered. "A crown!"

He picked it up. It was a roughly fashioned crown of tin.

Tredeed leaned back against the wall and stared, with his lamp hanging forgotten in his fingers. This, then, was old Jan Tredeen's hiding hole—the secret place of the King of Penzion Cove! That tub in the corner had once held French brandy, and here was tin enough—uncoined and untaxed—to pay for a thousand like it!

But he paid no heed to the tin. He was staring at the skeletons—remembering all he had ever heard of that night of disaster that had ended Jan Tredeen's reign as a smuggler. Tredeen had been wounded, had disappeared, had fled to France in the lugger—so some had maintained. Hugh looked at the skulls, one by one. Beside two of them were the remains of light helmets.

A scrambling noise and the gasp of a man close at hand aroused him from his daze. He leaped toward the stope up which he had made his way, and turned his light down it.

Porth had been struggling up the same way that he had come; but the rubble that Tredeen's movements had dragged down had made the hole much smaller, and the bigger man was fairly caught and held almost immovable. The constable snarled impotent rage as the rays of the carbide lamp revealed his helplessness.

Feverishly, with his bare hands, Tredeen worked to free him; then gripped him by the collar and dragged him bodily into the chamber.

"Look! Look!" he shouted. In his exultant frenzy he shook the constable violently, and then let go of him,

to turn his lamp upon the gruesome remains in the chamber. "What do 'ee see?" he demanded. "Look at that tin crown! Now do 'ee say Jan Tredeen, the King of Penzion Cove, fled to France—from uniforms? Count the skulls, and count the helmets—and Tredeen badly wounded on the beach, at that!"

Porth struggled to his feet. Without speaking, he looked upon the remains of that ancient, bitter fight between dragoons and smuggler in the secret stronghold. Slowly he read the story as Tredeen had read it.

"He did not desert his people—he did not flee like a coward!" Hugh Tredeen exulted. "Never!" He shook his fist in the constable's face. "Do what 'ee want!" he shouted. "I'll run no further from 'ee—uniform! Come on! Fight! As they did—to the end!"

Shouting, he kicked a rusty sword toward the constable, and caught up the cutlass for himself; but Porth did not move. He was still staring down at the rude crown of tin, the symbol of a dead authority. He paid no heed to the frenzied man who besought him with brandishing cutlass to fight.

Soberly he pushed aside the dragoon's sword with his foot.

"Have done, man," he said to Hugh Tredeen. "There were Porths killed on the beach that night with the Tredeens."

Stepping carefully over the scattered relics of the ancient battle, he made his way to the hole in the wall of the cliff, lifted himself through it, and climbed down to the smugglers' path.

Tredeed, who had been watching his retreat with the cutlass in his hand sagging lower and lower, leaped across the chamber after him.

"Wait, partner! Wait!" he called.



"We're only a
windjammer,
Mister Mate!"

The Last Windjammer

*"It seemed a pity deliberately to kill such a craft;
it was like murdering a well-loved woman
just to keep her from shame"*

By Captain Frank H. Shaw



WHEN you come to think of it, that's near about the last time a halyard shanty'll ever be sung—properly," said Captain Benjamin Foote.

"Boney was a warrior!" came in solo from the fore-topsail hal-yards; and the loud-throated, inspiring chorus answered bravely: "Johnny Frangswar!"

"Hardly seems true," said Mr. Hiram Chugwell. Then, as the topsail yard went up more slowly, he rattled down the Staunchlake's poop ladder, and, nipping forward with astonishing activity for one of his advanced years,

leaned his weight on the rope with ob-jurgations of encouragement that seemed to electrify the toilers. The yard was mastheaded successfully.

"Grog ho!" boomed Captain Foote; and the crew shambled aft, eighteen men and two boys. Most of the men were old, stooped of shoulder, men who moved slowly except when grim necessity ordained swiftness, because of the rheumatism with which they were racked.

"Steward!" The cabin servant came on to the wind-swept poop with a big enameled jug.

"Good heal', sir!" "Here's looking toward us, sir!" "Luck to a good

ship, sir!" The toasts varied, as did the veterans who proposed them, but all were sincere.

"Nothing the matter with the way she weathered that snifter, cap'n!"

When the last of the fore-castle crowd shuffled away, Captain Foote and Mr. Chugwell disposed of the lees of the brewage. The Staunchlake had just emerged from a five days' riot in the focus of a cyclonic storm of considerable magnitude. Now that the worst of the flurry was over, it was possible to get the muslin on her and set her moving homeward again—on the last lap of her last voyage; and she was the last of them all—last of the gallant fleets that depended on God's good winds for their speed, and owed nothing to the mechanical craftiness of a present age.

"No, mister, nothing the matter. She handled nicely," the skipper agreed.

"Seems a big pity—going home to be broken up or turned into a cargo hulk, sir," Mr. Chugwell mentioned, for at least the thousandth time since the homeward passage commenced. "Lots of fight in her still—"

"Wrong kind of fighting," grunted the skipper. "Old-fashioned."

Their eyes met and quickly averted; and the one thought was present in two minds. They had trifled with the question before, but had never directly mentioned it. Maybe it was the reaction after the fighting five days, during which the old windjammer had given a gallant display of dogged courage and seaworthiness, that worked within them now. At any rate, Chugwell voiced the idea almost brazenly.

"She'd be happier dying out in the open," he said.

Men can wax as sentimental over a ship as over a dog, say; or perhaps

even a woman. Captain Foote loosened the strings of his sou'wester and nodded, so that his unshaven neck rasped on the collar of his oilskin. There hadn't been time for shaving or any of the ordinary ameliorations during those bleak five days. One would have thought the hard beset ship might have broken their hearts enough to rid them of all sentimentality. But:

"She deserves to die decent," agreed Captain Foote. "Not that she's ever been anything but a slut in my day; only—well, I reckon folks built more into a ship than they do now. Aye, it's a pity—sold foreign to break up, eh?"

"Now, there's a place—" the mate said, feeling his way, as it were.

"Thinking of barratry, are you, Mr. Chugwell? Robbing the insurance?" But the skipper's voice was not very condemnatory, either.

"The insurance—bah!" said Chugwell. "They've done pretty well out of her, this way and that. Forty-five years she's been sailing, hasn't she? And never cost the insurance folks a penny—barring a bit of lost canvas here and there."

"Forty-six," the skipper corrected. "I've sailed in her for forty of them, since I joined as second mate in 1889. We've been through a few times together, mister, this old hooker and me."

He did not exactly pat the pin-rail, as clean scrubbed now as ever; but rather his rough hand stroked it lingeringly.

The easing wind harped mournfully through the stripped upper rigging; almost as if crooning the dirge of a vanishing era.

"The way I look at it," said Captain Foote, groping under his oilskin for a plug of tobacco, a knife and a

faithful pipe, since smoking was again possible, "is this: it's a rum start when you come to think of everything. Here's sail — windjammers—been going on for long enough, thousands and thousands of years. Not what you'd call a vast amount of change during all the centuries. A few more yards crossed, a handier style of steering, yes; wire rope instead of hemp, and rigging screws 'stead of dead-eyes and lanyards, maybe—but this packet here"—again the gnarled hand seemed to caress the teakwood—"isn't as different as all that to ships that sailed blue water before the first Roman put his foot on English land. There's been a bit of history made between then and now—with these same old windjammers."

The mate broke in with:

"Reckoning back to old clipper days?"

"Clippers! They're parvenues. You know, what with this and that, the world wouldn't rightly be a world if it hadn't been for sail. Sir Francis Drake, now—and before his day, long before. And this is the last of them; under our flag, anyway. Up there at Darlington once—I'd to wait for a train—they've got the original locomotive that Stephenson built—and how long ago was that? A matter of a hundred years, maybe. Here's a ship that stands for a couple of thousand years of sea history, in a manner of speaking, going to be sold foreign to be broken up—or laid by as a coal hulk. Doesn't rightly seem fair. If I'd only got the money she wouldn't come to that; but windjamming don't help bank accounts; not these days, that is."

"What happens to ships that's broken up?" asked Chugwell, who, like many a seaman, was peculiarly igno-

rant of what went on outside his chosen trade.

"Oh, I dunno. Melted down, likely—boiled down like old horses that have served their day."

"You'd think some one would come along and buy her and keep her, wouldn't you, sir? Even if it was only to show to boys and tell them how history was made!"

"Folks are too keen on making money to trouble over history," said Captain Foote witheringly. "I fancy she'll stand that main topgans'l now, mister."

When the added canvas was piled the curious thought occurred to Foote that the Staunchlake was reluctant to get her speed and hasten homeward. Normally, after a fighting bout, she had seemed to quiver with eagerness to be up and doing. True, she was foul of bottom, owing to her long, idle wait abroad for a cargo to bring home—and during that wait all hands save only Foote himself had been paid off—but this hint of lassitude in her was a revelation.

"I expect even an old horse knows when it's being taken to the knacker's yard," he thought.

"Maybe she's wishing she'd gone right out in that blow."

A less stanch ship might have done, or one less cunningly handled. But, casting back, he could remember no inertness on the Staunchlake's part during the cyclone; she had exhibited all her old aggressive qualities; beating the sea at its own game—for the last time, for the last time! It seemed a pity.

The sun dipped past the meridian, eight bells was struck, the second mate came up to relieve—another old-timer, dug up from the beach out foreign, where he'd allowed himself to go to

pieces. A windjammer man, though—and they were difficult to get.

The trouble to which Foote and Chugwell, once Chugwell signed on, had gone to scrounge up stick-and-string men was hardly believable. It was a rarity to find a man who knew his earhole from breakfast time aboard a windjammer, these days. Half the foredeck crowd had been *made* into sailormen during the long homeward trip—as it had been in the old harsh days, when you relied on crimps to fill your forecastles with the scum of the gutters, on account of the gold diggings. But they had made sailors of the packet rats; no one could deny that. There hadn't been anything wrong with the work done aboard during the Cape Stiff weather.

"She looks good, trimmed this way, sir," volunteered the second mate. "Do we start in with the painting again, now it's fined off?"

"Painting? What's the good?" Like ordering a new dress for a woman on her deathbed, Foote thought. "Turn your watch to at scrubbing and whatnot—keep 'em busy," he said.

He went into the chart room to work up the position, having got a longitude sight at eight o'clock. He had thought the ship had been making better going of it than she actually had. She was sluggish; she was loath to get home, that was it.

Yet, in his younger days, she had been by way of being a clipper—some of his passages were more than good. Nothing to come up to the old tea clippers, of course; no, nor yet the Australian wool flyers; but not so bad for a windjammer of this present year of grace.

And he admitted privately that he himself was reluctant to return—since return meant what it did. It wasn't

just that he would be workless—too old to ask around for a new employment; it was because it would mean saying good-by to this old companion of his youth, middle-age and old, and in such a way, too.

He could have surrendered her to a successor almost cheerfully, in the belief that she would continue afloat to carry on the traditions of her kind; but to have to remain ashore and see her towed—of course they'd tow her, as a final ignominy—away to the ship-breakers, promised to be rather too much of a good thing!

By dint of being careful he could contrive to live out the remainder of his years in idleness, since old windjammer skippers had no breaking up value. No, he wasn't afraid for himself. It was a great pity there wasn't some sort of an association of sentimental leanings which would make it its business to preserve historic monuments such as the Staunchlake was, for the benefit of posterity.

II

CAPTAIN FOOTE prided himself on his intimate knowledge of the history of the sea and the ships that used it. His library consisted entirely of books dealing with that not uninteresting chronicle, from the first coracles that ever spread a cloak of skins to the breezes, by way of galleys, long ships, cogs, galleons, Indiamen, to this present day. He knew that ships not greatly different from the Staunchlake had linked England with an outer world since before the days when Christ walked the earth. But the Tower of London, a parvenu erection of eight hundred years or so, was a place of sanctified interest, yet, but for some craft such as the Staunchlake, that Tower might never have been built.

Queer, when you came to think of it!

"There'd be a mighty fine song and dance about it," he said to Chugwell, at dinner—pea soup and salt pork and lime juice—"if some one up and sold Westminster Abbey to be turned into jerry-built houses, mister."

"She'd be better buried decently than come to shame," said the mate. "Me, when my time comes, I hope it 'll be in a gale, me working all out; sudden and kindly—with my boots on."

"It could be managed," admitted Foote. "I don't know that I'd care such a mortal lot if I went with her."

"Same here!"

"But there'd be a risk—to the crowd, mister. If one of them went west I'd be a murderer."

"If it was rightly done, there'd be no risk to any of them," said Chugwell, and lowered his voice, as the steward was audible in the pantry. They never definitely fixed it that the *Staunchlake* should not complete that voyage whose final port was ignominy; but it seemed as though a tacit understanding grew up between them.

Foote said nothing; the responsibility was his. Not that he had really decided to let the *Staunchlake* die in action. One of the blackest crimes in the whole nautical calendar is barratry—throwing a stout ship away for the sake of her insurance value; and it was pretty certain that the *Staunchlake* was fully covered, both as regarded ship and cargo. So that to let the ship die fighting would be a crime—no getting away from it. But one night they leaned over the chart of the North Atlantic and decided on a spot where it could be done.

None the less, it seemed a pity. Hitting a spell of fine weather and crisp breezes, the ship stirred herself and gave an exhibition of what she really

could do, swinging along across the whitecaps with the buoyant stride of a youngster, curveting saucily, with her cordage singing a gay and goodly lilt.

She was very beautiful in the mass, although she was rusted and starved and bleached. Foote and Chugwell, and Carline, the second mate, all took pride in trimming her perfectly.

Carline was never admitted into the plot; but he knew what was in their minds, and he had no complaints to make; for the past months had brought to him, a derelict, a recrudescence of a vanished manhood; from being a beach comber, content to drift through aimless days, he had become a person of authority, at whose word men jumped. Men don't forget that sort of thing.

"She's singing her swan song; oh, yes, she knows all right!" Foote said to the mate. "But if I'd only got money enough, mister, it wouldn't be necessary even to think of it. I'd just buy her out of hand and moor her somewhere—unless I took her to sea again as a sort of yacht until we went down together—fighting it out all the time."

"If I'd any money I'd come in with you, sir; but—"

Never a saving man, Chugwell; he was windjammer bred, where thrift is not inculcated. It would probably be some seamen's charity home for him when the *Staunchlake* was finally paid off. Salt water might exercise a magnetic influence over the fates of such as served it, but it certainly did not recompense its slaves with golden rewards.

They trifled with the subject. Captain Foote was torn between two problems—the disgrace awaiting the ship, the disgrace awaiting himself if he did what was in his mind to do. He had, through the warring years, kept his

ticket clean; no small matter in a competitive world.

Indeed, his record was surprisingly good, and there can be no doubt that if he had wished to climb the upward steps would have been comparatively easy. One or two honest bits of rescue work showed to his credit; the fact that he had kept the *Staunchlake* afloat was in itself a sterling testimony.

He mightn't have made a commercial success of the old windjammer; but that wasn't his fault. He was competing in an unfair market, and was, in a way, like a man armed with a bow and arrow endeavoring to beat off legions armed with machine guns and poison gas.

To wind up an unblemished seafaring career with the most atrocious crime known to seafaring humanity was something a bit too thick to be contemplated with equanimity. He sometimes hoped in a quiet sort of way that a proper gale would happen before the *Staunchlake* struck soundings—a gale beyond even his power to weather—so that the ship could go down fighting to the end, in a worthy, Viking sort of way.

III

WHEN the big gale did come it was the biggest he had ever encountered. That winter, as the world knows, held a record for appalling weather—at sea and ashore; and as the cyclone quickened in retching squalls, the old man believed that his prayers—yes, he had prayed about the matter more than once—had been answered. But his fighting instinct prompted him to do all that was possible for his crew, and that meant nursing and humoring his ship in this that was probably going to prove her last engagement with a crafty and unscrupulous enemy.

Mr. Chugwell ventured to speak more openly, since the end of the voyage was drawing close.

"If she doesn't finish up in this breeze, sir," he declared, "she'll have had a good fight for her last; and we can put her down nicely in the place we'd thought of."

"We could!" admitted Foote. "Easy enough to get a bit mixed in your reckoning after a spell of this sort of weather! If she went on the rocks there—she'd go decent. And the St. Ronans' folk are good at lifeboat work; it's their boat."

"Got the rocket gear there, too, sir—in case the boat slips up."

So they were admitting it at last! And both men admitted to a greater contentment now that the matter was decided on. Only now did they understand how they had fretted against the ignominious finish to a proud old ship—last of all her sterling breed.

Compared with the beautiful models that had used the sea and the winds of all those seas, the *Staunchlake* lacked in loveliness, maybe; she had never been contrived for picturesqueness, only for economical utility; but she owned a beauty of her own, nevertheless—so that the trudging steam freighters that passed her, sullyng the stormy sky with trails of sooty funnel smoke, looked hideous and slatternly to her people's eyes.

But to the minds of the three old men aft it was not so much the ship herself as what she stood for, that mattered—two thousand years of history consigned to the ignominious scrap heap!

And the type the *Staunchlake* represented had been the schooling place of a nation. Why, when you came to think it over, windjammers were the harbingers of civilization the world

over. You couldn't get away from it, try as you might to argue against it. Look at America—where'd that fantastically advanced country have been but for Columbus and his caravels, Drake and Raleigh and a host of such, all wind borne? Africa, Australia—to mention but a few; and apart from these, what about the kind of history that goes into the books?

"Where'd the navy have been but for stick and string?" Mr. Chugwell wanted to know.

"Merchant service stick and string at that!" grunted the second mate, who was a partisan. "Where'd any of us be but for windjammers? Not born—because such as might have borne us would have starved to death. But they've got the Victory all treaced up and on exhibition at Portsmouth; and Nelson was a merchant service man part of his time, too."

"They've got the old Cutty Sark put by—she was saved, come to think of it, mister."

"The nation didn't do it, though. She might be the last of the clippers—I sailed a voyage in her, myself—but she's not to be identified as the last of the *windjammers*."

But as the storm increased in magnitude such discussions necessarily ceased; though the underrunning sentiment remained the same. They shortened the *Staunchlake* down to her fighting trim; and they fought her, marveling at her greatness—for in that ultimate battle she was greater, maybe, than ever she had been.

If they had cursed her for an unweatherly old slut that would neither sail, steer, nor anchor in bygone days, they exultantly discovered her finer qualities now. It seemed a pity deliberately to kill such a craft; it was like murdering a well-loved woman just to

keep her from shame. And yet, what else was there to do?

IV

A DAY or two before this gale breezed up into full liveliness, the S.S. *Clydespool*, the latest venture in shipbuilding perfection, set forth from an English port on her maiden voyage. She was the property of the owners of the *Staunchlake*, and she embodied all their most advanced dreams of what an up-to-date ship should be. She possessed as much beauty as a floating tank; she was merely a mobile box, with one end pointed to bore through the seas.

Every last detail of her construction was intended for stark utility. She was practically flat-bottomed, in order to allow more cargo space in her holds. She carried two pole masts—to sling her wireless aërials to and to carry her bunting on. Samson posts poked up from her steel decks in a forest—merely as an aid to swift handling of freight.

Her bridge—modern substitute for the time-hallowed poop of the centuries—was simply a platform to hold a parading officer, a helmsman who juggled carelessly with a trifling tiller that actuated a very cunning hydraulic steering engine, and a number of automatic gadgets that communicated with the clamorous engine room below, which was the real heart of her.

She was a veritable robot of the seas; almost capable of completing a voyage without the aid of the human element. She could carry a matter of twelve thousand tons of freight at an economical speed of twelve knots on a limited coal consumption. If her constructors had only planned her to use oil fuel instead of coal, she could have been comfortably handled by a crew of

just over a dozen men.

She hit the northern edge of the gale, and put her snub nose down to it and wallowed slovenliwise; having none of that springy elasticity which the lift of canvas gives to a sea borne fabric. She bored through crashing combers, and threw their crests over her forward deck in whole water.

She required small tendance beyond what a hand on her telegraphs could give; and not a man of her crew would have understood the meaning of an all hands' call. Her men were union men, painters, and scrubbers, able to take a trick at the wheel, and little else.

But the Clydespool was already proved, by figures, to be an economical success. She carried four times as much cargo as the Staunchlake had ever carried, with a smaller crew, and on smaller working costs, when time of transport from one port to another was taken into consideration.

On the second day of the gale something went wrong with her telemotor steering gear. There had been such faith in her main gear that the supplying of preventer steering apparatus had been ruled out as unnecessary. She fell off into the trough of the sea when her rudder jammed; and a procession of whitecaps boarded her.

Captain Lance, who was young and wholly steam trained, decided it was advisable to rig a sea anchor until the defects in the steering gear were repaired. This was done—not easily, because of the shortage of men, though the winches assisted to a considerable extent.

The autocratic chief engineer grumbled about the unwarranted use of steam, even when it was pointed out to him that the rolling of the sluggish hull constituted a genuine menace to the ship's safety.

"What's a bit of rolling?" he asked.

But gave the steam, and the sea anchor was got over the bow after twenty-four hours of soul-searing labor. Before it made its pull on the weaving bow felt, the Clydespool gave the father and mother of a roll, a dizzy roll that seemed to promise capsizing. Before she could right herself a procession of Atlantic graybearded waves rioted exultantly over her. There were nasty crashes; but people were too busy hanging on for dear life to give any heed.

Cascaded by the sea, the Clydespool wallowed like a cow in a bog. Steam began to stream up through the stokehold ventilators, and there were wild cries from below, before a handful of oily, coal-smearred men rattled up the vertical ladders and stormed the bridge.

"What's wrong with you?" gasped Captain Lance.

He was told, spittingly, through chattering teeth, that the boilers had fetched away, severing sea connections. As his mind grasped this fact a very big sea slammed down thunderously on his fore deck and crushed in a hatch.

There was really nothing to be done. The Clydespool's maiden voyage was not progressing auspiciously. It had lasted some eighty hours to date; but in that time the ship was nothing better than a wreck.

You cannot raise steam on leaky boilers, that are threatening to burst through the ship's side at every sick roll and drop to the bottom of the sea, as heralds of the coming of the parent ship. And without steam engines are useless. Furthermore, even if the Clydespool had been able to secure all the steam in the world it would not have done her much good, since the

damaged steering gear was not yet repaired.

She slugged tiredly on the cable that connected her with her sea anchor, and the gale grew in magnitude. Night fell, adding to horrors. They wallowed and made shift to repair the damaged hatch; but when they laid derricks across it, and secured fresh tarpaulins, the beating combers laughed shrill mockery of their efforts and swept the preventer defenses clean away.

With the breaking of day the chief engineer, who had got steam on the donkey boiler enough to keep the pumps going after a fashion—though the ship was squattering lower in the water at every roll—suggested the advisability of abandoning ship before she sank under their feet.

"How 're we going to abandon?" demanded Captain Lance. "Look at the boats!"

The engineer looked and saw none, nothing but bent and vacant davits. Then he whistled through his teeth and stared out over the half tide rock that was the Clydespool.

V

SHE looked like a half tide rock to the eyes of Captain Foote and Mr. Chugwell, as that dawn brought the valiantly fighting Staunchlake in view of the wreck. The gale was hard enough to shorten the last windjammer down to a single goose-winged topsail; but under that sparse rig she rode moderately buoyantly, and even contrived to make almost negligible headway. The large amount of leeway she was making was really all to the good, since it took her nearer to the reef of rocks off the French coast that Captain Foote had selected as the altar of her final immolation.

"That tramp's making a holy mess of herself," he roared to Chugwell between his funneled hands.

"Rolling like hell!" agreed Chugwell, but he used a more picturesque simile that may not be printed here.

"Doing something else besides rolling!" said Foote, after a critical inspection. The inevitable sea fog that accompanies a northern latitude gale had hidden the Clydespool from view until the windjammer was almost on top of her. "What's that she's doing?"

"Firing rockets—seems to me!" said Chugwell.

"Fine lump of a ship, too—she'd carry us on her fore deck and not notice us," Foote mentioned.

"All that," Chugwell agreed.

"Rockets mean trouble—and she's a steamer; we're only a windjammer, mister mate!"

"Sending 'em up pretty busily, sir—looks like she's in a bad way. Wait and I'll get the glasses."

There was bunting snapping at the signal span, and between them Foote and Chugwell read the frantic messages. The Clydespool, having made her number, mentioned that all her boats were gone and that she was *in extremis*, consequently her urgent need was to abandon ship while opportunity remained.

"Clydespool, eh? Wasn't that what they were going to call their new crack freighter—our folks?" Captain Foote asked. Mr. Chugwell didn't know; he had never taken any keen interest in steam.

"Big ship—Clydespool, looks new, too. A rum start, mister, if she's our folks' very latest word, wouldn't it be?"

"She's in a hell of a hurry, whatever she is," said Chugwell.

"Well, what about it? We'd best do something, don't you think?"

"I'm game, sir," said Chugwell; "if we can mop up a boat's crew." Captain Foote worked the *Staunchlake* into a convenient strategical position; and Mr. Chugwell, having secured sufficient volunteers, took the lee lifeboat away across the churned and noisy gulf. He returned, after certain heroisms, with Captain Lance and the entire crew of the *Clydespool*.

The stokehold crowd were so badly scalded that they were raving in delirium for the most part. Before they were got comfortably below into the main saloon, turned forthwith into a casual ward and hospital, the *Clydespool* pointed her shapeless bow at the lowering storm clouds, and slithered down stern first into Davy Jones's Locker; leaving no evidence of her passing, since she was built entirely of steel, which does not float.

As the boat was hooked on, with difficulty, to the tackles, the *Staunchlake* gave a little frisky curvet, which might have indicated pleasure, or again, might have signified triumph.

One thing was certain; the last of the windjammers survived while the latest of her successors had perished ignominiously. But Captain Foote and Mr. Chugwell had no time just then

for exultation. The ship needed their every energy, for the gale was increasing in frantic gusts, as if angry at this victory, but riotously determined to wrench the laurels from this immediate conqueror.

The gale shut down, and endured with frenzied ferocity for three unspeakable days. Through its rigors the *Staunchlake* fought doggedly, and finally emerged on the other side of the devastating storm, breathless, gaunt, and scoured down to her steelwork, almost, but alive. The sun came out reluctantly from behind the drooping clouds that still scudded frantically across a livid sky.

"Mister," said Foote, slowly stroking his grizzled beard. "It really doesn't matter what they do to her now. Selling her foreign won't disgrace the old packet a little bit, whatever it does to those who sell her. They could turn her into a mud barge if they liked, but—we'll know, and maybe a few others 'll know. We'll take her home the proper way."

Mr. Chugwell nodded agreement.

"Shake out that main topsail, mister."

The *Staunchlake* flirted her stern proudly as she felt the added impulse of canvas. The last windjammer sailed on.



THE KICKER

In all sorts of places, poor fellow, we found him,
 His troubles and anguish my words cannot paint;
 'Twas but when the arms of his loved one were round him
 That of his surroundings he made no complaint!

Anonymous



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If you find the way out, cut out the puzzle and SEND YOUR ANSWER QUICK

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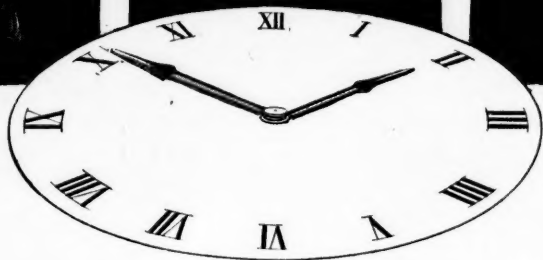
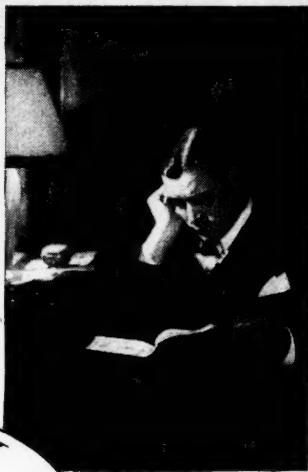
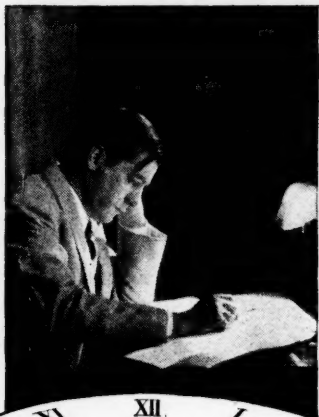
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MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE

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There are twenty beautiful girls pictured here. To be sure, they all look alike, but, examine them closely. **TWO** and only **TWO** are exactly alike in both dress and features and all the rest are different. See if you can **FIND THE TWINS**.



Clues! The beautiful twins are dressed just alike—their hats and clothing are just the same. Some of the girls have beads on, others wear earrings—the hats on some have a checker-board pattern, etc. The twins, however, who are alike are dressed identically the same in every way—so, study each girl carefully and if you can **FIND THE TWINS** send the numbers of them to me at once. YOU may become the winner of a Buick Sedan or \$1825.00 CASH MONEY, —without one cent of cost to you. I will give away **ABSOLUTELY FREE**, a new Buick 4-door Master Six Sedan and 9 other new Closed Cars, including 3 Coupes, 3 Sedans and 3 Coaches and the winners can have CASH MONEY instead of the automobiles if you prefer. **15 BIG FREE PRIZES** will be given—totaling \$7500.00 in CASH MONEY.



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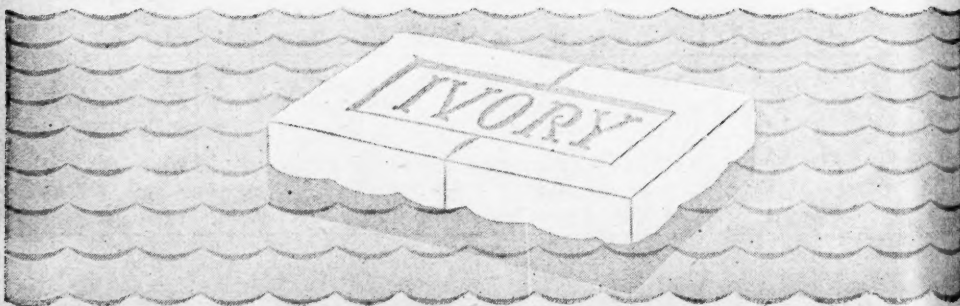
Is your mind a merry-go-round when you

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October

WARM languor overflows the days,
And lassitude the nights:
It is a month of lyric ways
And winged delights.

Take sail in fancy with me, dear,
Upon the seas of rime:
We'll down the bay and disappear—
High tide, high time!

Look how the billows dance and break
And tumble all apart:
The ocean's calm as any lake—
But oh, my heart!

There's love and magic in the air,
And life—and life's desire:
The wind leaps laughing through your hair;
Your eyes flash fire.

The salt spray glistens on your cheek;
Your lips are calling low:
Ah, Soul, we dare to rise and seek
What none may know!

H. Thompson Rich



"Mademoiselle will pardon," he began

The Fair Infidel

What harem life did to a pretty French chambermaid is just nobody's business

By Condes Neve

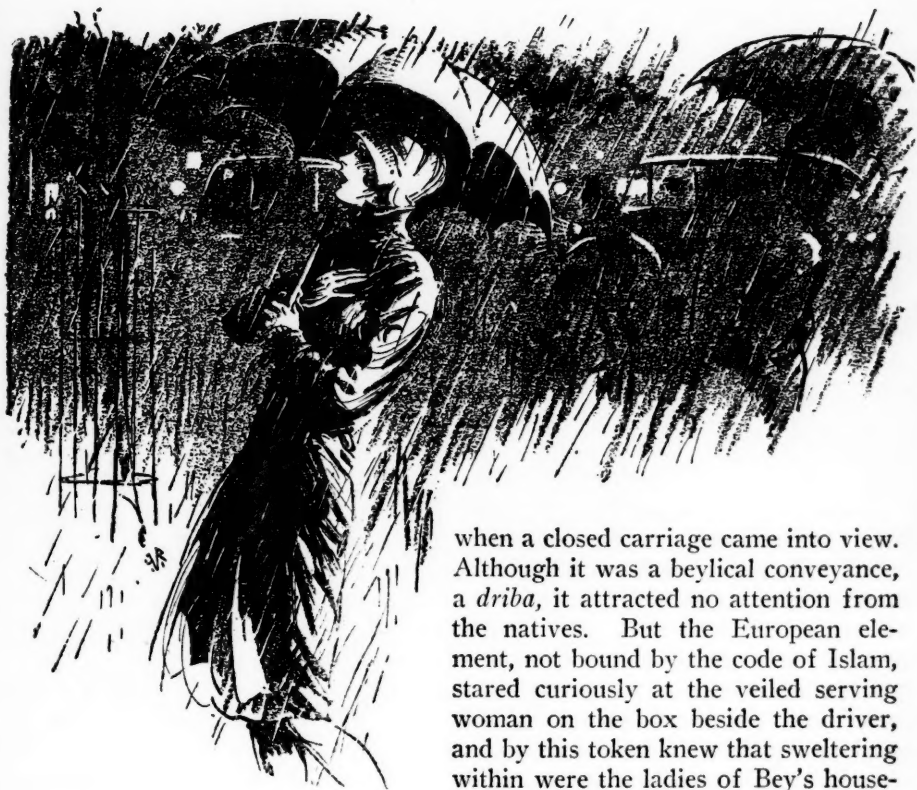


ON the day that Mohammed Al-Hasan, Bey of Ifrigia, left for Paris to be the nonofficial guest of the French Republic, the North African capital was all agog. Crowds poured in from far and wide. The streets were packed for hours in advance of the time set for the passing of his highness to an armed cruiser waiting in the harbor. The white *djebbas* and scarlet headgear of the Arabs, massed under a

blazing sun, dazzled the eye. Sweating Frenchmen and a few tourists occupied points of vantage along the line of march.

It was a colorful procession. First came a detachment of resplendent *Chasseurs d'Afrique*; then the Bey's Guards. Followed the herald in scintillating attire, bearing staff and banner and, in stentorian tones, proclaiming the titles and virtues of his sovereign lord.

When the Bey's landau came in



sight, the massed Arabs cheered wildly. Beside the white-bearded old man sat his prime minister, Si Mustapha Zukariya, whose young, handsome face and splendid figure might have served as a model for a Mohammedan fallen Lucifer. Rumor had it that he was soon to marry the Bey's favorite daughter, which enhanced his popularity with the people.

Down on the quay a band was playing; a detachment of French infantry waiting. Mussulman banners floated lethargically against a faint breeze from the sea.

All along the route the crowd acclaimed the greatness of Allah, his prophet and their Moslem ruler. The street show was to all purposes over

when a closed carriage came into view. Although it was a beylical conveyance, a *driba*, it attracted no attention from the natives. But the European element, not bound by the code of Islam, stared curiously at the veiled serving woman on the box beside the driver, and by this token knew that sweltering within were the ladies of Bey's household, accompanying their lord to the French capital.

Just as the carriage turned into the Porte de France, a small hand fluttered at the window. It was a beautiful hand, and a tall Arab who jumped back to escape being brushed by the carriage wheels, appeared lost in admiration as he fixed his eyes upon it. The long fingers with their highly polished nails seemed to be playing on an imaginary piano.

It was well for the youth that his native brethren standing near were too much absorbed in their own observance of etiquette to notice his breach. For he had already incurred displeasure by his unceremonious haste to cross the street almost in front of the horses, and the driver had found it necessary

to call out and pull up sharply. But as the carriage passed, a laugh went up. The offender, it appeared, had been jostled, and a jar he was carrying beneath his cloak went crashing to the sidewalk.

The air was filled with a pungent perfume. Small boys howled with glee and soaked their dirty rags in the ooze. The unfortunate one paused only long enough to recover the broken jar; then, under cover of the good-natured banter, lost himself in the crowd.

A few hours after the French warship had sailed with the Bey and his retinue, the lithe young Arab might have been seen to embark on one of the *Compagnie Générale Transatlantique* passenger steamers, bound for Marseilles.

II

THE weather in Paris had not been propitious. In fact, it had been pronounced *exécrable*. Long stretches of rainy days had sent discomfited tourists to other parts, to the disgruntlement of shop and hotel keepers. But on the day of the Bey's arrival, the sun came out long enough to dry the flags and banners which decorated the streets through which his highness was to pass.

The hotel in which the government had elected to house their guest and his entourage was one of the smaller and more exclusive of the caravansaries in the Avenue Champs Élysée, not far from the Bois de Boulogne. Two entire floors had been reserved for the Bey—one for his private use, the other for his retinue and for audiences.

The management thus honored saw a chance to recoup somewhat the losses of the season. They fine-combed their staff for the best servants, and in-

structed them in the special duties and etiquette the occasion demanded.

Among those chosen was one Henriette Chapuis, a young chambermaid who had been working at the hotel for several years. She was a genial little person, with a keen memory for faces and names as well as for the idiosyncrasies of foreign guests. The management was not slow to notice that returning guests frequently asked about Henriette, and preferred apartments on such floors as came under her supervision.

Such little attentions as inquiring after absent members of the family, the patron's health, special attentions to a pet dog, and mending lingerie were sure to result in generous tips. And the young chambermaid was in fair way of accumulating the coveted dowry necessary to her marriage. For, be it known, Henriette Chapuis was betrothed to a soldier man—one Sergeant Pierre Bourget, now seeing service in an isolated post of a Spahi regiment, somewhere in the south Sahara. And as every French *mademoiselle* knows, a sergeant's pay is not sufficient to provide for a wife and the inevitable family.

Pierre led a dull and monotonous existence, if his letters were to be credited. The heat, the lack of recreation, the too close contact with his superior officers, the hope of transfer to a more comfortable station long deferred to make sick the heart, nostalgia for his native soil, and especially insatiable hunger for the lips and arms of his sweetheart—these made the burden of his song.

And so that the day of their marriage might be expedited, Henriette scrimped and saved, denying herself everything but the bare necessities of life. Admirers she had aplenty, but

to dance wears out the shoes which cost money. Besides, when one's heart is elsewhere, what availeth the little compliments and attentions?

Her evenings, when not on duty in the hotel, were given over to remaking or refurbishing frocks given her by departing guests and fashioning fine lingerie for sale. In two years—three at the most—she hoped to have accumulated enough to go to North Africa and marry Sergeant Bourget—unless, meanwhile, the powers were moved to transfer him to his native France.

Henriette's room on the top floor of an old house was adorned with snapshots of her sweetheart, some taken against a background of naked black babies; camels and passing caravans, and all that went to make his isolated life.

Once he sent her red morocco leather slippers with gilt ornaments. Again a trinket he had bought in a bazaar while on leave. In return she made and sent him little comforts. Never a colonial post came in or went out that did not carry a weighty letter to Es-Shalif or Paris.

Adorning the wall back of the table where she sewed of nights was a map. On it she had traced the route from Ifrigia to the end of the railway whence a dotted line marked the trail of the convoy which went out from Wargla to Es-Shalif. The location of the post was designated by a tiny tri-color mounted on a pin. A little clock, salvaged from a wastebasket in the hotel, rubbed elbows with her Big Ben, the difference in time between Paris and Es-Shalif computed to a second. Often she would pause in her sewing to look at the clock and visualize what her soldier sweetheart was doing at that hour.

"My poor dear boy!" she would

murmur tenderly. "You are not alone. Henriette is with you in spirit."

Sometimes on Sunday after church, or on a free afternoon, Henriette visited friends or went with them on an excursion to Versailles. But her leisure hours were few. Maman Baptiste, the old housekeeper, told time by Henriette's coming and going, so regular were her habits.

Maman Baptiste occupied a room five steps down from the level of the courtyard. The house had once been a great mansion. Two ponderous wooden doors gave entrance to a square court which was large enough for a carriage and pair to turn around. What glories the old lodging house had once seen—*alas!*

Upon the girl's return home, Maman Baptiste would hobble up five steps and call out:

"Good day, Henriette!"

If her lodger were hungry, the old crone would ladle out a plate of soup from an earthen crock on the back of the stove. Then there would appear from a paper parcel a bit of rare fruit or some other dainty purloined from the hotel through the connivance of an admiring waiter. Sometimes, too, a half bottle of claret or white wine which a guest had left. Or again it was a pair of shoes, a discarded overcoat or a man's suit which a kind-hearted patron had passed on to the obliging chambermaid. Not having any relatives in Paris, Henriette would pass on the clothing to Maman Baptiste for her numerous progeny who lived in the environs.

Then would follow a period of gossip: the annoyances or humorous incidents at the hotel, news of a sick one, a death, the temperamental franc, and eventually the conversation would veer to the warrior across the sea.

On the days when the colonial post came in, Henriette would come dashing to the door, her eyes bright with expectancy.

"Well?" she would say, smiling.

Then Maman Baptiste would look grave and wag her head.

"He forgot you this week, my dear," she would answer. "He has found some one more to his liking. Perhaps a black girl with gold bangles on her fat legs."

But all the while she was talking, her hands would be busy beneath the black apron. When the hands stole behind her back, it was *mademoiselle's* cue to fall upon her. Followed a pretense at struggling for the prize, with Maman squawking, and the cat, Louis le Grand, remonstrating over the neglect of attention. Sometimes Henriette read aloud excerpts from Pierre's letter. Then it was time to climb the four flights of stairs with Louis le Grand at her heels, to work late or answer the letter, to set the alarm clock, to say one's prayers and go to bed.

After this fashion, and with little variation, the three years since the separation from her lover had been passed. The Bey's visit seemed to bring Sergeant Bourget closer.

III

THE apartments assigned to the Bey's ladies ran the full length of one side of the hotel, from the narrow corridor which led to the service room and employees' staircase at the rear end, to the front of the building where they joined the salon which connected with the Bey's private apartment.

Each lady had a bedroom and bath, besides sharing a salon in common. The proprietor had embellished their chambers with flowers; many couches and cushions had been added, it being

assumed that couches and cushions were the natural concomitants of a harem.

The care of the Bey's suite fell to an elderly chambermaid; that of the ladies to Mlle. Henriette. And within a few minutes after their arrival it became plain that the latter job was no sinecure. The dial of the bell register was in fair way of being put out of commission.

From the very moment of their entrance there was trouble. The mature *beyas* quarreled over the matter of precedence, though no one room was better than the other. Nilofer, the Circassian concubine, still weak from seasickness, planked herself down on the nearest bed, only to be driven forth by the irate *beyas*. The woman servant stood helplessly by, wondering why Allah had chosen to inflict this journey upon her defenseless head.

While the *beyas* were shrieking and spitting at one another like sleek, overfed cats, and hurling cushions, the Princess Safie Devlet Khatum, the Bey's young daughter, selected an apartment at the end of the hall near the service room—because it had a balcony—shut and locked the door between, and rang for a maid. As soon as the *beyas* discovered this wanton breach of etiquette, they pooled their differences and began a concerted attack by pounding on the locked door, hurling insulting epithets and alternately pushing the call bell. And since Safie was the only one among them who spoke French, the bewildered chambermaid was on the verge of distraction.

The Bey, hearing the racket, came in to inquire the cause. A word or two from his highness restored order and asserted his authority. The *beyas* went sniveling to the rooms he assigned.

When Safie entered, refreshed by her bath, Henriette surmised that the slender, black-haired girl with pale olive skin was not only a spoiled darling, but the apple of her father's eye. The imperious look on her countenance, the haughty curve of her throat, melted when he smiled and caressed her.

After the Bey had retired, the Princess Safie called Henriette to her room and asked for assistance in unpacking the luggage.

"They will keep Hanoumon, the servant, for hours, and out of spite," she confided. "But *mademoiselle* must pay no attention to the quarreling in the menagerie. They are jealous of me. They cannot forgive that my father loves me more than their sons and daughters. But they fear me just the same."

And Henriette having witnessed the blows and snarls and squeals of rage with which she drove off the annoying *beyas*, quite believed that the Bey's favorite daughter was capable of holding her own.

But with food and rest the relations became more amicable. It being the *beyas'* first visit to Paris, they were avidly curious concerning the ways of Parisian women. They flung volleys of questions at Henriette whenever she appeared in answer to their summons, which was often. Safie was called upon to translate.

Conversation ran something after this fashion: having observed the numerous boxes of candy which were consumed daily, Henriette had asked whether the ladies were not fearful of taking on fat. The rotund *beyas* shook with laughter. They advised Henriette to eat sweetmeats if she ever hoped to find favor with a man. No? Was it not so in her country? How strange!

Nilofer, the Circassian, too, was painfully slender, but the effect would be remedied with time.

As for Safie, who has just turned sixteen years, with her bones still showing, she, no doubt, had imbibed some ideas from foreign women whose newspapers she read. Foreign ladies preferred to resemble boys. The *beyas* had seen females of this type during their drives about Ifrigia. How they had giggled! Truly, one could scarcely tell whether these creatures were coming or going, since before and behind were flat and wholly without distinguishing marks.

Clothes being a favorite topic among women the world over, they exchanged opinions anent their respective styles. How shameless were the foreign women! With legs exposed to above the knees, with evening dress cut down almost to the navel, with no sleeves—what remained to titillate man's imagination?

They desired much to know what the French *mademoiselle* wore beneath her skimpy frock. They lifted her skirt and seemed surprised that she should be so modest about showing her person. Her legs were shapely, but should be covered and preserved for her lord's eyes only. Thus the Arabian ladies chatted with Henriette.

Then, the weather—did the maid believe the rain would ever cease? Their lord had promised them a shopping and sight-seeing tour. But who wanted to wade across flooded pavements or drive in such a continuous down-pour? Was it only to sit in rooms chilled by the damp and stare out at a sunless sky that they had suffered the awful ocean sickness? And, now, to make matters worse, their lord had contracted a cold which confined him to his apartment.

As the days passed, with no change in the weather, the *beyas* sulked and moped. Their tempers grew more irritable. Safie solved the problem by shutting herself up in her own room, refusing even to dine with the others in their common salon. She waylaid Henriette on every opportunity, and delayed her long after hours. When she learned that *mademoiselle* made lingerie, she gave her a huge order for lounging robes, which necessitated fitting, to say nothing of a selection of materials and colors.

It was patent that Princess Safie was lonely. They exchanged confidences. What more natural than that Henriette should tell about her lover? And what more natural than that Safie should confide not only her heartache, but give a glimpse of the romance which had come into her life? It was to please her father that she had consented to marry Si Mustapha Zukariya, his prime minister, whom she disliked. Always she had dreamed of marrying a lord for love. Her dear lamented mother, an Egyptian princess, had not only adored the Bey, but had been deeply adored by him.

One day Safie confided, while she was driving in the environs of La Marsa, where her father had a summer palace, the horses had taken fright. The woman servant on the seat beside the driver had been thrown off, the driver being caught in the reins and badly mangled. Picture now, her own terror, alone in the closed carriage with the horses dashing wildly ahead; the carriage swaying from side to side, then suddenly overturning at the very moment when the frenzied animals were brought to a standstill; whereupon she opened her eyes and emerged from unconsciousness with a man's arms about her, his

great lustrous eyes bending close.

Truly she thought she had died and was awakening in Paradise. For a long time they looked into each other's eyes before she thought to cover her face with the veil. Then he spoke softly.

"Know, beautiful princess, that I who have looked upon your face will henceforth know no peace, either in this world or in the next, unless we meet again. Speak quickly! Already help comes. How shall this be possible?"

"Like a dream," the princess continued to Henriette, "I heard him speak, and answered. 'My lord, my lord, I do not know. I am the Bey's daughter. I am already promised in marriage.'

"'You love?' the Arab answered, his eyes burning into mine.

"'No, my lord, I have not loved till now,' I said.

"'Inshallah! We shall meet again. Go often to the *suk* of the perfumers. Watch—'

"There was no time for more words. Those who had witnessed the accident came hurrying upon the scene. While we waited for another carriage, I saw the Arab mount and ride away. Allah! But he was handsome! That night I was torn with love.

"The next day I went to the *suk* of the perfumers, though I was bruised and lame. He was waiting at a distance. When he passed by I dropped a letter I had written, saw him pick it up.

"And so, *mademoiselle*, that was the beginning. By bribes we have continued to exchange letters, but my heart is hopeless. Though my father loves me dearly, I dare not tell him. When I learned that he was planning to come to Paris, I thought I saw a

way, but at the last day he decided I should accompany him. There was time only for a letter to my beloved, telling him of my departure. I told him to await the passing of the carriage at the Porte de France, where I would signal my heartbroken adieu.

"That is all, *mademoiselle*. Whether I shall ever meet my lord again is in the hands of Allah. For on my return to Ifrigia, my marriage with Si Mustapha will take place."

The princess was no longer imperious, but wept bitterly. Moved to sympathy, Henriette took the girl in her arms and sought to soothe the grief.

Alone in her room under the mansard roof that night, Mlle. Chapuis thanked God that no barrier stood between her and her man, except that of money, which would be remedied with time. Nevertheless, her heart ached for the beautiful princess.

IV

BUT the next morning Safie's romance was relegated to the back-ground. The *beyas* had come down with heavy colds, symptomatic of the prevalent influenza. Nilofer, the Circassian, was in a bad way. A woman physician was called in and a nurse installed. By the doctor's orders Safie was sequestered. The Bey was confined to his bed. It was a hard and trying day, with call bells jangling continuously; demands for hot water bottles, broths and God only knew what else. Hanoumon, the serving woman, was practically useless.

It was with a sigh of relief that Henriette changed into her street clothes that evening and started for home. Her feet were tired, her head ached, and there was still a letter to be written to Sergeant Pierre if the outgoing post was not to be missed.

The rain was coming down in sheets when she left the hotel. She had gone only a block when some one stepped to her side and addressed her in correct, if oddly inflected French.

As Henriette tilted her umbrella to look at the speaker, her eyes widened. She recognized him as an Arab she had encountered on the service staircase during the morning. It appeared he had lost his way and come there by mistake, and, believing him to be a member of the Bey's retinue, she had courteously directed him to the main hall. It had occurred to her at the time that the man had looked at her longer and more penetratingly than the occasion required. However, he was a barbarian, and probably knew no better.

"*Mademoiselle* will pardon," he began, "but I have something to say which may interest her."

Mademoiselle regarded the speaker with narrowed eyes. A flirtatious barbarian, eh, Still, his eyes were grave.

"Is it that *monsieur* has, perhaps, taken advantage of our encounter on the stairs this morning?" she inquired with a shade of truculence in her tone.

"It is not as *mademoiselle* thinks," he replied. "It is not to amuse myself that I take this liberty. It is because of a matter of great importance that I risk your displeasure."

She looked at him appraisingly for a full moment, then with a shrug of her shoulders, said: "All right, *monsieur*, but please to speak quickly. Already I am wet to the skin, and I have not so many clothes that I can afford to spoil them."

The Arab looked about.

"Is there not a café near by where we could talk over our coffee?" he asked.

"Surely, surely, *monsieur*. But I

warn you now, *monsieur*, I am both tired and cross, and in no mood for nonsense. It has been a difficult day for me, what with the ladies of the Bey's household sick in bed and the running back and forth—"

She broke off as her companion, who had fallen in step beside her, came to an abrupt halt.

"Sick!" he exclaimed. "*Mademoiselle*, in the name of Allah, the All Merciful, please to tell me. The Princess Safie—"

Henriette's gay burst of laughter drowned his words.

"Ha! *Monsieur!*" she bantered, her face all smiles and dimples, her eyes bright with mischief. "Now, I perceive the importance of your business! Now, I know that it was not chance which brought you to the service stairway. You took great risks, *monsieur*, thus walking into the lion's den. You see, *monsieur*, I know your secret. The princess has honored me with her confidence. But rest tranquil. Your loved one is not sick. She is separated from the others to avoid infection. Now, let us hurry before my shoes are altogether ruined."

Late that night Henriette alighted from a taxi and dragged herself up the long flights of stairs. After she had disrobed and thrust her feet into the little red morocco slippers, she sat down to think.

"It is a risky business," she confided to her sergeant's portrait. "To be found out would mean dismissal and a bad name. Still, one must be prepared to risk something for a thousand francs. A thousand francs are good pay for carrying a little love letter, is it not?"

She crooned softly to herself as she kissed Sergeant Pierre good night. What a big swelling to the dowry those

thousand francs would make! Truly, *the day* was leagues nearer.

Henriette had neither asked nor expected remuneration for her good offices. While the Arab was writing the letter, she had partaken of some coffee and a cognac or two which the man had persisted in ordering. She had asked no questions except perhaps a few about the Great Erg, where her man was stationed. Before the letter was finished she had fallen asleep. She was only half awake when he assisted her into a taxi, pressed a little wad of paper money into her hands for the fare, as she supposed. Yes, she would watch for him the next evening to deliver Safie's answer. Good night, *monsieur*. No, it was nothing. She was delighted to be of service. She, herself, was in love and could sympathize. Yes, she would cooperate.

The first thing the next morning Henriette went to Safie's room and delivered the letter. If there still remained any qualm about the risk she was taking, they were quickly dissipated at the sight of the girl's joy. She wept and clung to Henriette's neck. The letter was the first intimation that her lover had followed her to Paris. An answer was written and waiting long before Henriette left the hotel that night. The Arab was waiting when she arrived at the appointed rendezvous.

But what a change was there! She had to look twice before recognizing him. Gone was the *burnous*, the *kufiyeh*, the soft leather boots. The tall man with luminous dark eyes who came forward to greet her, was clad in European sporting flannels. He might have strolled in from Deauville that day. His complexion was no darker than a deep-tanned European who had lived in the tropics.

"I cannot say, *monsieur*, that I think it an improvement," Henriette whispered when the waiter had gone to fetch their order.

"It is safer, *mademoiselle*," he replied, as she slipped a letter into his hand beneath the table cover. "Arabs are not so common in Paris as not to attract attention, and that is the last thing I want to do. Also, there is always the chance of meeting some one of the Bey's retinue who might recognize me."

Henriette nodded understandingly. "Truly, love gives *monsieur* wisdom!" she remarked sagely.

Now, in Paris, as you may know, the proprietor of a café has no objection to letter-writing patrons. He genially supplies pen, ink, and blotter, and sometimes the paper, knowing that the longer the letter the larger the bill for wine and liquors. And certainly, two of his patrons that night wrote lengthy epistles. Henriette kept no secrets from her man.

The rendezvous continued for a week, though each time they met in a different place. Henriette nightly reported the condition of the sick ones, brought and carried away bulky envelopes, and on several occasions delivered to the princess parcels which she assumed to be presents. If sometimes she wondered what the lovers were plotting, she asked no questions. Her business was to earn the thousand francs.

Safie, too, out of the gratitude in her heart, had pressed a gift upon the maid, a beautiful pendant set with a flawless pearl.

"I will not accept it," Henriette had remonstrated. "I have already been overpaid for my services."

"But it will make me happy, my friend," Safie had replied. "Please

to accept it as a little wedding present," and there was no peace until she consented.

V

A FORTNIGHT after Henriette's first meeting with the Arab gentleman whose name she did not know, the invalids arrived at the point of convalescence. The ladies of the harem still groaned and kept to their beds, but were once again able to eat sweetmeats.

Safie confided that her father's illness had left him much debilitated, and because of the continued inclemency of the weather, the physician had advised him to remove to the seashore—Deauville, perhaps. The French resident general had already gone to this summer resort with his family. All functions had been canceled.

The princess expressed her regret at being compelled to leave Paris—no, not Paris, but Henriette. For how now should she be able to communicate with the loved one? She seemed very grave.

That night the Arab did not detain Henriette very long. His letter had already been written when she arrived. He walked with her some distance before hailing a taxi.

"It is to say adieu, *mademoiselle*. In another day I journey homeward. But, *inshallah*, we shall meet again one day. I shall not forget your kindness and understanding. Meanwhile, a last token of gratitude."

"But, no, *monsieur*!" Henriette remonstrated, waving aside his hand which held a little pouch. "I will take nothing more."

"Please, *mademoiselle*," he urged. "For your dowry."

"Since you put it that way," she replied with an amused laugh. "But may the saints guard me, for I shall

not feel safe until the bank opens in the morning."

With a faint smile she stuffed the pouch into her hand bag. The Arab looked thoughtful for a moment, then drew from his pocket a dagger sheathed in red morocco leather, curiously engraved.

"Here, take this as a memento, and as a means of protection—who knows?"

Henriette accepted it, too astonished to say more than a brief "Thank you."

As he hailed a cruising taxi, the Arab added in a low tone: "May Allah give thee health and happiness and bless thee with many sons."

"Good luck," she answered. "One day, perhaps, we shall meet again."

He waited until she gave her address to the driver and drove off, then turned and walked rapidly away. When he had disappeared around a corner, a ferret-faced man emerged from a basement where he had been listening and watching. With a furtive look about, he began to search the sidewalk and the gutter. He spat viciously and slunk away, repeating as he went the address Henriette had given the taxi driver.

Maman Baptiste was covering her canary cages for the night when the taxi drove up. She knew it must be Henriette, since it was a rare occasion when any of the tenants indulged in such an extravagance. And nearly every night for two weeks, now, *mademoiselle* had come home in this fashion.

Maman Baptiste wondered whether this unwonted expenditure might not indicate a rich admirer in the offing. But no! The thought was an unworthy one. *Mademoiselle* was a good

girl. She worked hard. Her heart was in the Great Erg with her man. No doubt some one at the hotel, seeing that she worked overtime, had arranged to send her home.

Maman Baptiste, locking the door to the street, heard her singing a gay little chanson as she let herself into her apartment.

The process of disrobing was punctuated with the reading of Sergeant Pierre's letter. Louis le Grand, interpreting the cooes and giggles as adoration of himself, stretched playfully upon the table. And when the contents of a little leathern pouch was emptied out, the cat dabbled at the glittering coins.

"Aha! You recognize a louis, is it not?" Henriette teased as she spun a gold piece for his amusement. "See, your majesty!" she went on, as she arranged them in neat stacks with much care and counting. One hundred gold pieces of one hundred francs each. Incredible! Add to this the thousand francs in the little bag about her neck; the money the pearl would bring—for what need had she of pearls?—the savings in the bank—O, la-la! la-la!

Truly the Arab was rich beyond all dreams, a veritable Midas! What would Sergeant Pierre say? Would he believe she had come honestly by this great fortune? She seized his portrait and pressed it to her heart.

"You know I am true to you," she murmured fondly.

She bethought herself of her bank book, hidden in a bundle of mending, and placed it in her hand bag. She would go to the bank the next day as soon as possible. It was not safe to leave so much money in the house. Meanwhile how to carry the argosy about on her person? Gold is not so

easily concealed — so much gold. In one's stocking? Out of the question, since skirts are short and stockings thin silk. In one's bosom? Equally impracticable, since bosoms were no longer in style. To sew it to the back of one's ceinture to depend like a dog's tail between the legs—but no! Not only would it be uncomfortable to sit on, but it might break loose.

After deep cogitation she hit upon a device. The gold pieces should be stitched one by one between a cloth, bound above the knee, and safely held in place to the flesh by strips of adhesive plaster.

As she plied her needle she held discourse with Sergeant Pierre's likeness.

"Soon, my darling, you will get a letter, telling you of our good fortune. Another month or two and I shall be on my way to join you."

At the thought of that happy day, she dropped her stitching and, uncovering an antiquated trunk, unpacked the contents. The lingerie was all completed. Was it not beautiful? True it was not all of silk, but one must have practical underthings for work."

It was long past midnight when the bandage was finished and fixed to her leg above the knee. She laughed softly to herself as she regarded her contour. La-la! But she was excited! would sleep never overtake her? And to-morrow would be another difficult day.

After tossing restlessly on her bed, she arose, poured a glass of wine, and with the dagger the Arab had given her she cut a thick slice of bread. Perhaps with a full stomach—and finally she did fall asleep.

VI

THE chimney pots of Paris were still draped with a gray vapor when a

small, dark-clad figure emerged from the street door. A drizzle was falling. With a furtive look to left and right, she opened her umbrella and walked rapidly in the direction opposite to that which she habitually took. Before she reached the first turning she broke into a run.

Within sight of the police station, she halted, gasping, her heart pounding wildly. Fear was limned upon every feature—fear and horror. No! No! She could not go in! How could she tell the guardians of the law that she had committed an awful crime—that a man lay dead in her room under the mansard roof?

She had not meant to kill. She had fought like a frenzied animal to ward off the cloth he sought to press upon her face.

It was the cat's sneezing and spitting, his yowls, that had awakened her from a deep sleep. Twice she had spoken to him, only half awake, bidding him be quiet. Then something—was it the voice of her guardian angel pierced her lethargy?

With a premonition of danger she had risen and groped her way to the table in search of a match. The little night lamp had burned out. She could not remember whether she had filled it before going to bed.

Then a hand had laid hold of her, pressed a cloth over her face. Chloroform! She tore at it desperately. A thief! A thief!

She tried to scream, but the biting odor strangled her. She had fought valiantly, kicking, biting, while her hands held fast to the man's wrists.

In the struggle she was thrown against the table. Her hand closed over the dagger. In a flash she grasped it and was striking blindly, swaying under the hold of the viselike fingers.

Then a smothered groan, a vicious snarl, and one hand released for an instant. But in that instant she had struck again—struck with a strength born of desperation, felt the pointed blade embed itself in flesh.

The table overturned with a crash. She bounded to the other side as the fingers relaxed. Something struck the floor with a dull thud—a gurgling sound.

She made a light and dressed as one in a hypnotic state. Again and again her eyes returned to that awful thing lying half across the overturned table.

Maman Baptiste was not yet up. What time was it? No matter. She must go to the police. But now, in sight of the grim structure, her courage failed. She visualized herself before the stern-faced inquisitors, charged with murder. There would be lawyers to eat up her savings. Perhaps long years of imprisonment, though the good God knew she had not meant to kill. No! She could not go in.

She hurried by. Flight from Paris, from France, was all that was left to her. But where, where? Unless to Sergeant Pierre's protecting arms. If only there were time. Time was what she needed.

It was hardly probable the thief's body would be discovered that day, perhaps not for several days. She tried to recall whether she had closed the door.

She decided to go to the hotel as usual. To wander about all day or try to hide would make matters worse if the police were searching for her. Then, too, should she not report at the hotel, some one might send a message to her home and thus hasten the discovery of the body.

And there was the letter to deliver

to Safie. That gold—had it brought her bad luck? At the hotel she would look at railway time-tables, learn about trains and decide what her destination should be.

Her route must be a roundabout one, so that in the event it was suspected she had gone to join her lover, it would not be easy to trace her. Maman Baptiste would be questioned by the police. She would tell about Pierre. But if God were on her side—and surely He knew she had struck only in self defense—there might be a way to reach Pierre, who would hide her in the desert country.

The morning hours were fraught with tension. She tried to appear natural, but during her frequent passages back and forth through the public corridor, she found herself stopping, listening whenever the elevator stopped on that floor.

Once, when carrying an armful of linen to the apartments, she collided with a man who looked searchingly into her face. Her knees trembled. It was only when he smiled provocatively that her brain cleared and she recognized the prime minister.

There was no chance to get away that noonday. The Bey's ladies lolled on their beds and called for the chambermaid to do their packing. Their lord had decided to leave Paris the next morning by special train. No, they were not going to Deauville, but were returning direct to Ifrigia. The Bey was very weak and the weather reports from the seaside resort were not encouraging.

Hanoumon, their woman servant, was still quite ill, so it was Henriette here and Henriette there, with no chance to escape unless to walk boldly out and throw caution to the winds. When she delivered the letter to Safie,

she found the girl strangely reserved. But, no doubt, she was grieving over her home going and the hateful marriage.

"You will come to bid me adieu before you leave to-night, will you not, *mademoiselle*?" Safie had asked and Henriette had promised, hoping nothing would happen meanwhile.

The time-tables were consulted secretly. It occurred to her that the safest way lay across the Italian frontier. But a passport was necessary to cross the frontier. Moreover, how would she be able to land in Ifrigia without the official document? Here was a complication she had overlooked.

She grew more desperate as the hours passed. Any moment the police might come for her. After all, had it not been better to go to the prefecture and make a clean breast of it at once?

But now — well, suppose she returned home as if nothing had happened, stopped to gossip with Maman Baptiste as usual, steeled herself to climb the stairs and enter the room, scream, run back to the concierge and tell what was lying on the floor? Could she go through with it?

VII

By nine o'clock that night the numerous trunks and boxes of the Bey's ladies were packed. After changing into her street clothes Henriette went to take leave of Safie. As she knocked on the door it was quickly opened and she was drawn into the dimly-lighted room. A whisper cautioned her to silence.

She stood staring, scarcely believing her eyes. For the girl who stood before her was almost a replica of herself: the same close-fitting hat drawn well down over her brows, the beige stockings and pumps, the flesh-colored

blouse, the short skirt and jacket only half concealed beneath the purple rain-coat.

"I must speak quickly," Safie whispered. "I have a last favor to ask of you. My lover is waiting. For an hour — two hours at the most — it is given me to foretaste of paradise. But I dare not risk it without your help, *mademoiselle*. Do not refuse—it is a simple thing I ask of you. You have only to put on my dress and slippers and tie the long braids at your neck. The women have gone to bed to fortify themselves against the journey. There will be no danger, as they will not come here. But even should they by chance enter, you have only to feign sleep or shriek at them as you have seen me do. Please, *mademoiselle*—an hour or two at the most and I shall have returned."

She hesitated, reading refusal in Henriette's face.

"Surely you will not fail me at the last moment, after all has been arranged! Think, *mademoiselle*, think what it means to us, this precious hour; a moment of bliss torn from a lifetime of horror. Do not refuse. My lord will make you rich."

But Henriette shook her head.

"The danger is too great, my princess," she answered. "There is danger for us both. Should by some mischance your absence be discovered, how should I explain my presence here, clothed in your garments?"

"There is no danger, dear friend," Safie declared, holding her arms. "The women will not enter, and I will tell you why. They will sleep soundly to-night. I have seen to that. My father is still in bed. I bade him good night an hour since. For my part, there is little risk. I will go out by the servants' staircase. I know the

way. Should I encounter any one, I will hurry by and call out a greeting. Look now! At this distance would you recognize me? Would you not think you were looking at yourself in the mirror?"

her, hot cheek pressed to hot cheek. "Allah will reward you for this night's good deed," she whispered tensely. "Now follow and lock the door. I will knock thrice when I return," and, as in a dream, the cham-



She saw herself transformed into a Mohammedan lady

She moved away, then back, imitating the French girl's carriage and gestures.

"Is it not perfect? Long hours I have prepared for this. Now you have only to give me the red umbrella and the scarf at the neck. No, no, do not refuse. In an hour—two hours at the most, I will be back."

While she talked she drew Henriette into the bathroom.

"Quick! I will wait and help you put on my clothes."

Half dazed, bordering on the verge of collapse from the night's hideous experience and the strain of the day, Henriette made no resistance as her clothes were stripped from her. She laughed a little hysterically as she saw herself transformed into a Mohammedan lady. Safie's arms were around

bermaid heard the door softly close.

For an indeterminable period she stood vaguely staring into space. Then something stirred in her. She made for the door, pulled it open, intending to call after Safie. It was madness! What had she been thinking about to be thus hypnotized?

As she stepped into the hall, she heard the elevator stop. Male voices. She sidled back, listening through the open wedge of the door. Then, as the footsteps receded, she closed and locked the door.

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It was too late. She had let herself become entangled in a hazardous situation. Well, anyway, she was safe from the police for a while. What was it Safie had said?—an hour, two hours at the most.

How tired she was! The bed seemed to beckon. An hour's rest would steady her nerves, give her courage to go back home and face the situation. She threw herself face down on the bed and pulled the covers up around her.

She awoke from an ugly dream, bathed in sweat. The night light beside the bed was still burning. How long had she slept? What time was it? She recognized the jeweled wrist watch on the bureau as Safie's, picked it up, bent close to the tiny dial, then uttered a sharp exclamation. It was two o'clock in the morning!

Where was Safie? What had delayed her? An hour or two at the most, she had said. Well, she would wait no longer. The thought of her own trouble surged over her like a great wave. The house would be closed. Maman Baptiste long since gone to bed—unless the police were already aware of the situation, in which event they would be fine-combing the city in search of her.

While Henriette hurriedly divested herself of Safie's clothes, her mind was scheming. If she were seen leaving the hotel at this hour, she would say she had been packing or sewing for the Bey's daughter. Any moment, now, Safie must return. She would confide her own terrifying predicament to the girl.

She was already in her skirt and blouse, and was putting on the jacket when her attention was attracted to something pinned to her sleeve. An envelope addressed to Mlle. Chapuis.

She tore it open with trembling fingers and read:

DEAR FRIEND:

Forgive the ruse I have been obliged to resort to. But I know that when I have not returned in two hours, you will be nervous and start to dress. You will then find this letter which is to tell you that *I shall not return*. By the time you receive this my dear lord and I will be miles away. You will guard my secret, I know. May Allah bless thee and thine!

Your loving and grateful,

SAFIE.

The revelation left Henriette stunned. Then a wave of anger swept over her. How cruel Safie was to have thus tricked her! Had they confided in her she might be flying from Paris with them. Why had she not at once confided her trouble to Safie? Without doubt the Arabian lovers would have helped her to get away.

Well, it was now too late to waste time over regrets. She must act quickly. To be found here by the Bey's women would implicate her in Safie's elopement. Oh, yes! She would keep Safie's secret! The girl had planned well. She burned the letter in the fireplace, taking care to see that not a scrap remained. Then, extinguishing the lights, she unlocked the door and crept stealthily out.

She was halfway down the stairs when voices caused her to stop and listen. She recognized one of the speakers as the old watchman.

"But, if she does not know of the murder, why has she disappeared? And who else could have killed the man?"

"There is no doubt in the minds of the police that *mademoiselle* killed him, probably in self-defense."

"Well, they will let her off with a light sentence—a year, perhaps, if she can prove—"

The voices grew dimmer and dim-

mer as the speakers walked away. Henriette darted back into the apartment and locked the door after her. The body had been found. The police were looking for her. Maybe while she was sleeping they had come to the hotel. "*A light sentence—a year, perhaps—*" So they would send her to prison? It was already too late to escape. Every exit from Paris would be watched.

If only she had confided in Safie! Safie! Her eyes rested upon the Arabian garments flung across the bed. Safie's clothing. A Mohammedan lady. The veil, where was the veil?

Henriette opened the trunk. It was filled with clothes. Safie had taken nothing with her. Two o'clock. The Bey's ladies would be called at six. The special train left at seven. A ship was waiting. Dared she? And if she failed? Well, the sea was better than prison.

VIII

THE rain came down in sheets, lashing through the canopy which stretched from the hotel entrance to the curb. It sprayed the black coats of the proprietor and his obsequious staff lined up to wish the departing guests *bon voyage*.

The Bey, haggard and pale, had been carried in a chair by his servants to the waiting automobile. The set smile of the prime minister had lapsed into a snarl. Cloaked and veiled, and resembling nothing so much as black bolsters, the Bey's ladies had climbed into a closed and curtained car and been driven in the wake of their lord.

With the departure of the last car, the proprietor shook himself like a wet cat and cursed impotently at the weather. The Bey's visit was only another debacle in a season fraught

with pecuniary disaster.

It was well for Henriette Chapuis that the *beyas* were sick and ill-tempered. Once aboard the train, in the carriage consigned to them, there began a squabble over compartments. The younger of the two slapped Nilofar, the Circassian, who promptly retired to a compartment and locked the door.

The Bey's alleged daughter took advantage of the domestic infelicity and barricaded herself in a compartment nearest the exit. She received food served by the wretched woman servant through a narrow wedge of the door, and, in response to the poor creature's inquiries, shrieked and drove her away in imitation of Safie.

Upon arrival at Marseilles, Henriette followed the others aboard the boat, and while the *beyas* renewed their quarrel over the right of precedence, she slipped into a cabin obviously not reserved for the Bey's entourage, deaf to Hanoumon's knocks and calls.

The *beyas* themselves, believing she had a better cabin than their own, demanded admittance, and for a time it was touch and go as to whether she would be discovered. But with the first motion of the ship, she was left in peace. It was not a rough sea, but there was sufficient motion to keep the ladies prone upon their beds.

Had any one been able to peep into the cabin occupied by the Bey's daughter, he or she would have wondered at the little rosary in the hands of a Mohammedan lady. For Henriette Chapuis was praying, petitioning the Holy Mother to protect and guide her.

The crisis of her desperate adventure would be reached when the ship landed. How to make her escape was the big problem. She must go ashore with the women. Before landing she

would don her own clothes, which she had carefully carried in a bundle beneath the voluminous cloak. Over this must go the Arabian trousers. Then she must slip away, discarding the trousers, cloak and veil, without detection, before Safie's absence was discovered.

The vessel which carried the Bey homeward was not the warship which had brought him to France. One of the regular *Compagnie Générale Transatlantique* steamers had been reserved, but a handful of ordinary passengers had already booked passage from Marseilles to Ifrigia.

This much Henriette had ascertained by observation. She was sorely tempted to engage in conversation with the French stewardess, but feared to take the risk. And there was much she required to know about the port for which she was bound. If only she might watch her opportunity and leave the boat without her disguise! But she had no passport. The Bey's ladies would not, of course, be bothered with this official necessity.

On the night before landing, she waited until the stewardess had retired for the night, and donning her own clothes, went out on deck. Somewhere about there was sure to be a seaman from whom she could gather necessary information. Thank God, she had plenty of money—a few francs in her little purse, and when that was gone she had only to cut a louis from the bandage on her leg.

That night a stiff gale was blowing. The decks were deserted, though it lacked a half hour of midnight. The air was good after her close confinement. She saw a deck steward stacking and lashing his chairs. As she came up he touched his cap. Yes, a rough sea to-night. What time would

they land? Were there many passengers? She had been sick and confined to her cabin. Other questions followed.

The steward appeared glad of the opportunity to talk with *mademoiselle*. He knew the city well. Was *mademoiselle* remaining long in Ifrigia? If so, perhaps he would give her the pleasure of showing her about the native town and the ruins some miles distant.

She was turning away when two figures rounded suddenly the corner of the deckhouse. A glance and she recognized one as the prime minister. She moved away without seeming to hurry, but once inside, scurried to her cabin. It was not probable that he had seen her face, she told herself. Surely he couldn't have recognized her.

IX

THE ship was late in making port, as the gale had developed into a veritable hurricane, and it was dark before the passengers debarked. Then there was a considerable delay in getting the Bey ashore. The rough passage had debilitated him, and his own physician had been summoned. The *beyas*, too, had suffered agonies. When, at last, they were able to get on their feet, they wobbled unsteadily down the gangway to the carriage awaiting them.

It was later recalled that Safie had preceded them in company with Nilofer, whose ears she had soundly boxed as they entered the carriage. And for no apparent reason except that the Circassian had accidentally caught Safie's veil in her bracelet. With a screech, Safie had flounced out, and Nilofer supposed she had gone back to await the *beyas*.

When, at last, the heaving, groan-

ing *beyas* were seated, and Safie had not yet climbed in, they shrieked to Hanoumon, all asking at once what was keeping the Bey's daughter. Hanoumon climbed down from her seat on the box beside the driver to seek the delinquent. She went back to the ship, returned with growing anxiety.

The *beyas* grew more voluble. Then the driver offered his opinion that the Bey's daughter had no doubt driven home in the carriage which had brought the Bey's physician, who had accompanied his highness in the latter's equipage. The suggestion brought forth new torrents of abuse, and the order was given to drive on.

But when the summer palace was reached, some five miles beyond the capital, and it was learned that Safie had not yet arrived, there was something akin to a panic among the Bey's ladies. Their lord would hold them responsible for his daughter's safety. If they had been derelict in their duty as chaperons, he would lay it to their jealousy.

The other women, who had been awaiting the return of the travelers, joined in the hue and cry. It was not possible to keep the truth from the Bey. But who dared carry such dire news to their lord?

Nilofer, the Circassian, was chosen, she being next in favor with his highness. But the quaking Nilofer was spared the ordeal. For when, after much waiting, she was admitted to the Bey's presence, she found him in bed, holding in his palsied hand a telegram his daughter had sent from Paris at the time of her flight. It had been awaiting his return. His Safie, child of a love union, was married. She begged his forgiveness and his blessing.

After the first shock of the revela-

tion the question arose as to who had impersonated the princess. Were the women blind? Or merely stupid? Great was the wrath of their lord. The love affair must have been going on for a long time right under their eyes. He questioned and cross-questioned without gaining any light on the subject. Then he dismissed them in disgrace and sent for Si Mustapha, directing the prime minister to investigate.

No doubt the man—thanks to Allah, his daughter had married a Musulman!—had provided the impersonator. If the identity of the seducer could be established he would be dealt with severely. The strictest secrecy was to be maintained.

Si Mustapha, smarting under the ignominy of having been jilted, readily agreed. He drove home white with rage. Not that one pretty woman meant more than another, but marriage with the Bey's daughter would have strengthened his hold on the aged ruler. Besides, it hurt his pride to discover that the beautiful Safie had preferred another man. Some one must pay dearly for this insult!

While dressing for dinner he chanced upon a newspaper he had bought before leaving the station in Paris. He took it up indifferently, glanced at the headlines.

A light flashed in his eyes. The chambermaid! The glimpse of the girl's face that night on deck. It had puzzled him. Where had he seen her before? He laughed aloud. It was like putting a child's puzzle together. The ease with which the Bey's daughter had carried out her plans connoted an accomplice. Money had played a part. Why not the little chambermaid?

In some way a man must have learned that *mademoiselle* was receiv-

ing money, followed her home, tried to rob her. It must have been a beautiful fight! And then she and Safie, no doubt, plotted together to their mutual advantage, each helping the other to escape.

If he were right in his surmise, the road to revenge was clearly indicated. But he must go cautiously. The French authorities must not learn that the girl was in Ifrigia—later, perhaps, but not until he had accomplished his purpose. Perhaps not at all, if the girl proved amenable.

The newspaper stated that the girl had a lover serving at a post in the south Sahara. Well, then, she would leave from the Gare du Sud. Poor, frightened little rabbit! It was tame hunting, but hunting, nevertheless.

X

MLLE. CHAPUIS decided to take the first train south. She knew, from what Pierre had told her in his letters, that at the end of the railway couriers went regularly to the next post. She pictured Sergeant Bourget's surprise, his alarm. He would not fail her. Somehow he would contrive to get leave and join her.

The sight of a gendarme at the railway station sent cold shivers along her spine. She inquired the time of departure, bought her ticket, and waited in a restaurant.

When it came train time she followed a heterogeneous crowd through the gate—men of various shades of brown, some black, turbaned men with bold eyes, oddly dressed women, some veiled, some with strongly Semitic features. She entered a second-class compartment that was empty. If only the train would start! She hid her face behind a paper she had bought.

It still lacked five minutes of leav-

ing when a man in Arabian dress passed through the corridor with a covert glance in her direction. Another minute and he turned back, stopped at the open door of her compartment, and addressed her in a low tone:

"I am a friend. I bring a message."

He pressed a letter in her hand and went out into the corridor. Her fingers trembled as she tore open the envelope, which was without address, and read:

MY DEAR:

We have learned of your great trouble and your quick wit in seizing the opportunity to leave Paris. But you are in danger. My father suspects. For this reason, and until my lord and I can make peace with him, you must accept our protection. We petition you to come to us at once. The bearer of this message will conduct you in safety. Do not delay.

Your loving

SAFIE.

Henriette reread the letter with a sense of misgiving. It looked like Safie's handwriting, but was she sure? Was it possible that Safie and her bridegroom had returned so soon? They must have left Paris that same night.

The guard was calling the passengers to get aboard. Henriette motioned to the Arab.

"When did the princess return?" she asked, watching his face closely.

"On the ship which came this morning, *mademoiselle*," he answered in oddly accented French. "My lord and lady learned what had happened to *mademoiselle* before they left Paris."

"They are in the city?"

"Near by. They are in seclusion. Otherwise they would have come in person. I have been sent with a swift motor car."

She held his eyes.

"How did you find me?" she began,

but the voice of the guard drowned his response.

"Quick, *mademoiselle*, before the train moves."

He motioned her to follow him through the corridor. The wheels were already turning as she stepped to the platform. Then he strode ahead without appearing to notice her. A closed car was waiting some distance beyond the station. As he opened the door, he said in a low tone:

"*Mademoiselle* will find cloak and veil within. It will be wise to cover her face."

In a subconscious way she took note of the narrow streets through which the automobile passed. The air was stifling and malodorous. She thought it must be the native part of the city. Turbaned figures stood in the doorways or squatted in little groups. Presently the way inclined and gave a view of flat-topped houses. There were the dome of a mosque, and against the spangled sky the needle points of a minaret. She had seen pictures like that.

The street into which the automobile now turned was wider, and bordered by high walls. When, at last, the car slowed up, the white expanse was broken by a pair of great iron-studded gates which swung open at their approach. Henriette caught a glimpse of a paved courtyard. The Arab who had ridden beside the chauffeur was down almost before the car stopped. He opened the door courteously and indicated her to follow.

The great house seemed very silent as she passed through the arcade, thence to a stairway and into dimly lighted corridors whose marble floors were covered with thick rugs. When the Arab had ushered her into a high-ceiled room, he bowed and went out,

closing the doors after him.

The room, she observed, was furnished after the French manner, but the frescoes and columns were Moorish. An incense burner sent up a cloud of sensuous perfume. There was a profusion of flowers and inlaid tabourets. Somewhere, hidden from sight, a clock chimed musically. Priceless rugs covered the marble-tiled floors and depended from the gallery which ran along three sides of the room. Through the window grille she could hear the splash of water.

So bewildered was the French girl that the sliding back of a panel at the far end of the room passed unnoticed. A man's low laugh startled her.

"Good evening, Mlle. Chapuis," Si Mustapha said with a mocking smile and deferential bow as he came forward. "It is a world of surprises, is it not? I did not think when I passed you a few days ago in the corridor of a hotel in Paris that I should be welcoming you as my guest. Please be seated. You are looking very tired. Is it that you have not dined? Permit me—"

He pulled a bell cord.

"I regret I have already dined," he continued, "otherwise it would give me great pleasure to sit with you and enjoy your conversation. Will you not be seated and remove your hat? Perhaps you would enjoy a cigarette?"

He took up an enameled box from the tabouret and extended it toward her.

"No? *Mademoiselle* does not smoke? What a pity! I assure you, smoking soothes the nerves."

As he lit a cigarette he looked at her out of eyes sparkling with sardonic amusement. Then he seated himself on the divan.

"You will forgive my little ruse,

Mlle. Chapuis," he went on, glancing over her person appraisingly, "but it was the only way I could give you my protection against the police. Truly, I am filled with admiration. What wit! What cleverness! What resourcefulness to be wasted on so humble a walk in life!"

He laughed tormentingly. Henriette was ready to cry, but controlled herself and spoke calmly.

"*Monsieur*, when you have finished amusing yourself, perhaps you will tell me for what purpose you have tricked me and brought me here."

"Tricked you, *mademoiselle*? Have I not just explained that I brought you here to protect you? Surely you do not object to being my guest for a few hours until we can find a way out of your difficulties? From the position of an obscure chambermaid to the guest of the prime minister of Ifrigia is a great leap, is it not?"

"It is an honest occupation, *monsieur*."

"But poorly paid, yes? And no doubt when an opportunity presents itself to make a little extra, one does not let it slip. But do not misunderstand me, *mademoiselle*. I am not blaming you."

Si Mustapha spoke more seriously.

"You have information for which I am willing to pay. I want the name of Princess Safie's lover and the details of the elopement to which you were accomplice. Think twice before you answer, *mademoiselle*. Much depends upon it."

"I do not know the man's name, *monsieur*," Henriette replied. "And if I did I would not betray his confidence."

Si Mustapha fitted his long, well-manicured fingers together and regarded her smilingly.

"Commendable! Commendable! But when one must choose between betraying a confidence and going to prison—"

He raised his shoulders deprecatingly.

"*Monsieur* may call in the police whenever he is ready. Perhaps at the same time he will explain to them why he has brought me to his house by trickery instead of going direct to police headquarters. Do not forget, *monsieur*, that I am a citizen of the French Republic."

Si Mustapha applauded.

"Admirable! Admirable!" he mocked. "One has now only to sing the Marseillaise. But, dear citizeness, we will not march to the Bastille just yet. There is, perhaps, another basis upon which we may strike a bargain. To deliver you to the police would bring me nothing. Had I entertained such an idea I should not have brought you here. Now we will crack the nut. Having been taken into the most beautiful Safie's confidence, you already know that my sovereign honored me by promising his daughter in marriage. But, it appears, Allah willed otherwise . . . although Allah means to compensate me for my loss, as evidenced by *mademoiselle's* presence here. Woman is woman, especially if she is beautiful. Already in Paris I was struck with the winsome little chambermaid, her lustrous eyes, the smoothness of her skin, the lips, the dainty feet and ankles. 'Exquisite!' I told myself. 'She requires only the proper setting.' Now, I ask you, *mademoiselle*, is there not in all fairness, some compensation due me for my loss to which you are a party?"

He spoke lightly, but there was a light in his eyes which brought the color to her pale face. He watched

her clench and unclench her fingers.

"I am a good woman," she said in a tone that quavered. "I am a good woman, *monsieur*."

"Naturally! That I believe! That is what interests me. One tires of the kind who are forever hawking their mutton. And for the ladies of social standing, they are too blasé. They require always new sensations. To hold them a man must spend all his time inventing new tricks, new lies. It is boring. One longs for the simple, the primitive, the trusting, the unawakened. And now that I meet *mademoiselle* at closer range, it occurs to me that she fits perfectly these specifications."

He paused to note the effect of his words. The gamut of emotions which played upon her face, gave him a savage pleasure beneath his smiling mask.

"Still," he went on, "I should be willing to deny myself this form of compensation in exchange for the name of my lost Safie's lover. Wait, wait, little dove," he cautioned as she opened her lips to speak. "Do not be hasty. I do not press you. Take time. A day, more or less—"

"I have told *monsieur* that I do not know the name of the man," she interrupted. "I spoke truthfully."

"It has slipped your memory for the moment, yes? The stress, the worry. Well, a night's rest will refresh your memory. As I have said, there is no great hurry. Meanwhile, perhaps *mademoiselle* would like a bath, a change of clothing. By good fortune I have brought from Paris some feminine frills for the ladies of my household. The boxes have not yet been opened, but if you can wait yet a few minutes before dinner—"

"No, thank you, *monsieur*, I wish to go."

Si Mustapha fixed his monocle and regarded her benignly. His eyes roamed over her crumpled skirt and coat to the soiled stockings and dusty shoes. He came closer, appeared to be debating whether to lay hold of her. His hand moved out. Her back was to the wall. A flame darted from her eyes.

Then he withdrew his hand and put it behind him with a laugh. He turned and crossed the room and again pulled the bell cord. At the panel through which he had entered, he bowed.

"I will come in to see you later," he said. "Enjoy your dinner, *mademoiselle*." And before Henriette could reach him the panel had opened and closed after him with a click.

The blows she rained upon it came back muffled. She darted to the double doors through which she had entered. They were locked. Through a half open grille she looked down upon a high walled garden and saw a white-robed figure doing sentry duty.

She was still standing wide-eyed when the purr of a motor reached her ears. Evidently Si Mustapha was going away—leaving her a prisoner.

XI

ONCE again the panel clicked and slid back. A portly negress entered, followed by two servants wheeling a table laden with covered dishes. The negress acknowledged her presence with a genial smile. As the servants went out she placed a chair at the table, speaking in French as she uncovered the dishes.

"Not knowing *mademoiselle's* taste in wine, my lord has sent both red and white. Will my lady be seated?"

She poured a glass of water, ladled out soup, then took her stand behind the chair.

"Eat, dear," she urged good-naturedly.

For a time the desperate girl stood lost in thought. Then, with a shrug of her shoulders, she removed her hat and gloves and sat down at the table. Truly

She tossed off the contents of the glass as one long thirsting. With a little urging she accepted another, laughingly bidding Henriette not to betray her to her lord. But she did not relax her watchfulness. When she re-



Her back was to the wall

one must conserve one's strength since one must fight. Then, too, there were any number of sharp knives which might possibly be concealed later.

But she soon saw that the negress was watchful. Well, a little wine might prove effective. She recalled that Pierre had once told her that the blacks were fond of strong spirits. She indicated she would prefer the Burgundy. Then, when her glass was filled, she ordered the negress to drink.

The woman laughed.

"*Mademoiselle* has in mind that the wine is drugged? But no. You are still doubtful? Well, then, to please you, I will drink it."

moved the fowl she took care to see that no knife was missing. No doubt she had been warned by her master.

While the negress was mixing the salad an idea was born in Henriette's consciousness. In front of her was a little pepper mill, the kind commonly used in France. It was filled with white pepper beans, and stood at one side of the table with other condiments. When ground, the beans would make a cupful, and with a cupful of pepper—

The woman's back was turned for a second. Henriette slipped the pepper mill into her coat pocket and stuffed her handkerchief over it. When the salad had been served, she contrived to secrete the red pepper cellar. She became almost gay.

The negress, believing the wine was

having an effect, laughed with her, and refilled her glass, but while she was drinking what Henriette had pressed upon her, *mademoiselle's* tumbler was upset. Oh, well, no matter. There is still a bottle of champagne.

Mademoiselle, it appeared, was getting a bit tight. Glasses were refilled. Now some Chartreuse. No, no coffee. She wanted soon to sleep. Hurry, now, have the table removed. Yes, she was sleepy! She stretched herself on the divan, and when the servants entered to remove the table, watched them out of the corner of her eye. If they should discover the pepper was missing! She heard the panel click, and breathed more freely.

The negress, too, was yawning, but appeared in no hurry to go. She pulled aside a heavy arras which concealed a door, opened and revealed the bedroom beyond. For a time she busied herself turning back the covers and unpacking a box. In a few minutes she reentered with some ornate pyjamas and a trailing robe which she exhibited with great pride. But *mademoiselle* was apparently asleep. So, without asking permission, she knelt and began removing the girl's shoes. *Mademoiselle* objected, and drove the laughing negress off, whereupon the wench squatted contentedly at the foot of the divan. She would await *mademoiselle's* pleasure.

This did not coincide with Henriette's plan. Already the clock was chiming the hour of ten. She dragged herself to her feet and entered the bedroom.

The negress followed and attempted to undress her. But Henriette would not permit such shocking familiarity. She seized the pyjamas and darted into the bathroom, barring the door behind her, to the amusement of

the wench, who chuckled insinuatingly.

When she came out, clad in the pyjamas, and drying her face with a towel, she threw herself on the bed and permitted the woman to draw up the filmy covering.

"Get out," she said. "I want to sleep."

Henriette was already breathing heavily when the negress went out. As the panel clicked she sat up in bed, listening tensely. The lights in the salon had been extinguished. She crept softly to the panel and listened, then felt her way into the bathroom.

Under the shaded light she found the pepper mill she had hidden beneath a corner of the rug. She ground the pepper quickly, emptied the contents of red and white into her handkerchief, stepped out of the pyjamas, then donned her own clothing and put over this the silken robe lest the negress return to surprise her.

The clock was chiming midnight when the honk of a motor car beyond the gates gave warning that the moment had arrived. She heard the soft purr of the motor in the courtyard. Crouched beside the panel she prayed mutely, fervently.

A soft click and the panel rolled back. In the dim light from the corridor she saw a hand reach toward the switch. The next instant Si Mustapha was gasping for breath in a cloud of pepper, cries of pain gurgling in his throat. As he plunged forward, clawing the air, the panel closed behind him.

Through the corridor the girl darted, but drew back at the sound of voices somewhere beyond. Now a turn in the opposite direction. The staircase. She remembered, it led through the arcade. The door was open. The hum of the motor was clos-

er, and she saw the glare of headlights playing upon the wall.

Two figures were engaged in a low-toned conversation. A shaft of powder was quickly flung, and the Arabs clutched wildly at their eyes. Out of the gate Henriette sped like a hunted deer, through the narrow, tortuous streets of the native city, dodging here and there an astonished wayfarer who turned to look after the fleeing form.

On she sped, seeing in every turbaned head an enemy. At last into a broad thoroughfare—the Porte de France in view. She turned, rounded the last corner with the beacon in sight—and collided with a gendarme.

“To police headquarters!” she gasped, clinging to the astonished minion of the law. “Take me to police headquarters!” and collapsed at his feet.

XII

M. BALBIQUE, the prefect of police, was a man of broad sympathies in spite of his bristling mustachios, which gave him an expression of fierceness. And like every native son of France, he possessed a fondness for dramatics. When Mlle. Henriette Chapuis’s story had been told, he bade her rest tranquilly.

He would get into communication with the department in Paris at once. In his opinion she would be acquitted easily, since there was no doubt she had killed in self-defense. Pending advices from Paris, he would release her on her own recognizance. Clothes were provided by his wife and daughter, a hotel chosen where *mademoiselle* might rest, secure under his protection.

The commandant of the Post Es-Shalif was advised of the situation, with the result that Sergeant Pierre

Bourget was granted leave and made the trip across the Erg in record time.

Arriving at Ifrigia, the bronzed warrior gulped back a sob of joy as his love-hungry arms tightened around the girl with an intensity that was painful.

“Oh, I missed you so much, my darling Pierre,” whispered Henriette, her eyes laughing, but misted with tears, her lips still moist from reciprocated kisses. “Night and day for ages I have been praying that you would hold me close to you just like this.”

“And I,” said Sergeant Bourget, “have been dreaming of you on the forced marches under the blistering hot sun, and at night under the stars—all the time—my precious, precious Henriette—I was always counting the hours until your next letter would come.”

So they were married, and as a wedding present the French Government transferred Sergeant Bourget back to France, where his bride was to stand trial.

Meanwhile, the man found dead at Maman Baptiste’s house had been identified as a notorious *apache*, long wanted by the police. Mme. Bourget’s trial was a mere formality. She was promptly acquitted and acclaimed a heroine. Old Maman Baptiste was in court, carrying a black bag from which emerged from time to time the feline head of Louis le Grand. Such a meeting! Such weeping and hugging!

Incidentally, the subject of how and by what means that chambermaid had escaped from Paris, and whither she had flown in her fright, was not brought up at the examination. That bit of information had been ordered suppressed by certain high officials. The French are a diplomatic nation.



The foreman and his problem

Cream or Lemon

The not unhappy story of Rosie who tried to be a stowaway on the ship of dreams

By Olga Moore



"MEN," said Miz Garry, proprietor of the cattle country hotel, "are a low lot, honey. I know. I've watched 'em eat for thirty years."

The sun struck little sparkling gusts of light from the pile of tin cans beyond the open door. Glittering and twinkling, the town dump heap shone on the edge of the lavender plain. A herd of several hundred cattle dotted the sage a mile to the east, and on a distant ridge three tiny specks

of horsemen were poised for an instant.

The girl moved restlessly. "But," she protested, "they don't eat *all* the time! There must be other ways of finding out."

The grizzled slattern smiled and peeled a potato with one long, smooth gesture. "Yes," she said, "there's other ways. I was married to three of them."

A slow blush crept over Rosie's thin little face, and she quickly lowered her glance to the carrot she was scraping

for one of the famous Garry House New England boiled dinners. She had heard much about those three marriages. Miz Garry was a woman of few illusions and almost no reticence. The sordid blows life had given her had left many scars upon her, but chiefly they had enriched her vocabulary and increased her stock of stories.

"Romance!" the older woman continued. "It's a word the writers and poets made up. It helps sell their stuff. But they don't really believe in it themselves. There was a writer out here once, and he didn't believe in love nor religion nor morals nor anything. But he wrote the mushiest stories you ever read. No, honey. Go with the boys if you must. Marry 'em if you must—there's worse ways of earning your living. But don't ever *believe* 'em! Don't get to trusting 'em. That's all I ask."

Rosie Mooney was ardent and eighteen and hope died hard. "There is Cap Givens," she pointed out. "He's been in love with you all these years—even when you've been married to other people. Everybody says you could have him now if you wanted to. Don't you think that's romantic—his being so faithful to you?"

"That," said Miz Garry dryly, "is why I don't marry him. I guess we got enough carrots now. Better start on the onions. Sandy Adams has been buzzing around a lot lately, I notice."

"Not exactly *buzzing*," confessed Rosie modestly. "He's just taken me to a few dances and the Bar F picnic and the Dry Creek round-up."

"Nice sort of kid," the hotel keeper commented. "I mean he ain't so bad as most."

"He's a good dancer," the girl conceded, blinking her eyes against the poignant scent of onions.

"And he's top hand at the Bar F," the woman pursued. "He's a pretty good catch, girly—as good as any."

Rosie smiled, but a shadow drifted across her lips and took refuge in her eyes, great, gray, vaguely troubled eyes, enormous in her small, pointed face. She looked through the fly-specked window at the dusty western street, the rambling, shabby street, with its rotting board walks and its two rows of frail, false-fronted shacks. Wild Cat Kirby's horse stood with trailing reins before the general store, Old Man Carson's dog scratched and yawned in front of the First National Bank, while down by the bridge she could see the weary black Ford of the Methodist minister.

"Oh, I don't know," she murmured. "Sandy's nice, but — but I've always *known* him! When I was a little girl I thought he was grand, but now that he's fallen for me—sort of—he seems just like anybody else. I'm so *used* to him!"

Miz Garry took up a great, globular tomato and cut it into bleeding slices, her mottled face suddenly tired and a little wistful.

II

A DOOR opened in the dining room, quick steps crossed the floor and a chair scraped as some one sat down at the table. Miz Garry rose ponderously and peered through the slit in the swinging door.

"One of those trifling surveyors," she grunted. "Think they own the world, coming in at all hours! It's that Kenneth Gray — fresh young whippersnapper. For two cents I'd tell him we're out of everything—I *will* if he isn't on time to his meals to-morrow! You go get the order while I open a can of beans and warm up the

roast. And don't take any sass from him!"

"I won't!" Rosie promised, her eyes two stars and her face a blossom. Radiantly she hurried across the dingy room to the one long table where all the patrons of the Garry Hotel were compelled to eat, the grimy long table with its spotted cloth and thin, bright spires of ketchup bottles, the bleak long table that became a shrine when Kenneth Gray ate there.

"Roast beef," she chanted worshipfully, "apple sauce, string beans, fried potatoes and peach pie. Will you take coffee or tea?"

Kenneth, sleek, dark, and cleanly built, looked up at her and laughed good-naturedly.

"Rosie!" he said. "My pink angel!"

She blushed. She always blushed when he spoke to her. And the way he pronounced her name made it suddenly fragrant and haunting, made her a slim, bright-petaled flower in a shadowy garden. When any one else spoke her name, she was simply a dull, drab little waitress in a drab hotel. It took Kenneth Gray to give her color, to give her glamour and loveliness.

"You aren't cross with me?" he pleaded, "because I'm late? You know, Rosie," he grinned engagingly, "I'm late on purpose! Honest. You'll talk to me then. When I'm on time you give me a snooty glance and wait on old Pete Heck. What *is* that man's power over you, Rosebud? He chews tobacco and smells like sheep camps, but he's a better man than I am, Gunga Din. He gets all your smiles, and I'm going to murder him some day!"

She wriggled her small hands together and beamed. She adored Kenneth's teasing. She adored his fabulous jealousies. Every day he was jealous of some new, preposterous per-

son. Sometimes it was a traveling man, sometimes a sheep herder, and once it was the Governor himself, stumping the State on a speaking tour. Kenneth had sworn he saw the Governor wink at her and had, sulked absurdly all the next day.

"You just led him on!" he had accused her. "Spilling soup on him that way! No *nice* girl would have done it."

"Coffee or tea?" she demanded sternly now. Kenneth went into a deep reverie.

"Tea," he decided at last. "I don't believe it's quite as bad as the coffee. Rosie, tell me — what *do* you see in Pete Heck?"

"Nothing. I can't stand him and you know it. Mr. Gray, do you take cream or lemon in your tea?" Her eyes danced and a dimple appeared beside her mouth. It was her great moment.

He started and clasped his hand to his brow, that smooth tan brow beneath the curling hair.

"Where am I?" he begged piteously. "I *thought* I was in the Garry Hotel in El Bar, Wyoming, but it can't be. I see white linen and shining silver. I hear celestial voices. A beautiful girl is asking me if I take lemon in my tea. It is — it surely is — the Ritz-Carleton! Since when, Rosie, has the Garry Hotel put on such high style? I didn't know any one within a hundred miles took lemon in his tea!"

"They don't," Rosie said. "And I don't think we got any. But I thought I'd *ask* you. It sounds nice."

"It does," Kenneth agreed. "It *sounds* beautiful. Wherever *did* you get the idea, precious?"

"In a magazine," she confessed. "There was a story where a lady asked a gentleman if he took cream or lemon.

She was the Lady Allison Atherton, and he was the young Lord Carlingdon. He was having tea in her apartment."

"He would," Kenneth said. "He's just that kind. Well, since you urge it, bring me lemon. By that I mean *don't* bring me cream, not El Bar's idea of cream. Give my love to Miz Garry, and tell her I like my roast beef well done."

"It is," she told him over her shoulder. "It was medium at noon and rare last night."

"He wants tea!" she told Miz Garry. Her tone indicated that a divine being, all brightness and light, had ordered a couple of thousand stars and a new moon.

"What if he does?" the landlady snapped, shuffling across the room in her carpet slippers. "It's nothing to get excited about. I've known men to want whisky."

III

QUICKLY Rosie slipped to the supply cupboard and hunted among the confused shelves.

"The salt cellar needs filling," she mumbled dimly.

But when she stood once more before Kenneth Gray, her eyes adoring his dark good looks, she bore besides roast beef and tea, a saucer on which reposed two golden rounds of lemon.

"I did find some!" she breathed. "Miz Garry was saving a lemon to wash her hair."

"Wonderful!" the young man raved, concealing a slight shudder.

"It—it looks real cosmopolitan, doesn't it?" Rosie pressed, avid for praise.

"Cosmopolitan? It's positively worldly! Sit down, Rosebud, and talk to me. Pete Heck's not here, and you

might as well practice your wiles on *some* one."

"A good waitress never joshes the diners," Rosie recited primly.

"I should hope not. If I ever catch you or any other waitress joshing me, I'll cut her head off. But I think you might sit down and talk to me—when I was late on purpose!"

"It wouldn't look good," Rosie protested, one eye on the kitchen door behind which Miz Garry prowled and muttered.

Kenneth arose to his clean height, and taking her thin little shoulders in both his hands, pushed her masterfully into a chair.

"There, my dear," he said, "you're flopped. Now talk."

Rosie gasped and put a startled hand to her throat. "No one—no one ever *forced* me to be comfortable before!" she murmured in a tone of pure, unbelieving wonder. Her eyes, luminous and gray and marveling, drank in the impudent, bright face before her.

"My dear, some one has to tame the shrew," Kenneth said, industriously squeezing lemon into his tea.

"You hadn't ought to call me 'dear,'" she pointed out, moral and reluctant. "You've done it twice today and three times yesterday."

"But you are a dear!" he protested.

"What else would I call you? No, dear, I'm going to keep on paging you until I reach the thousand mark. I propose to fight it out along this line if it takes all summer. Now say something else—dear."

She swallowed and obediently cast about for another topic. "You going to the dance to-night?" she achieved at last.

"Sure. The Geological Survey's giving it, you know, and I'm on the music committee. I've sent for those

Paint Creek players, Bill and Hallie Logan and Gordon Morgan, with our own Cap Givens on the banjo. Don't you think, dearest, that will tickle the local toes?"

"That 'll be grand! I just love to hear the Logans. Don't you think Hallie's pretty?"

"Pretty? She's miraculous. Makes me think of a girl I knew in college—Mary Strickland. Same devilish eyes, same teasing mouth, same—Oh, hell!" He took a great gulp of tea and with sudden bitterness stared out the window at the sunny, brooding street. There was memory and hunger in his voice, and a lonely sort of ache.

Desolation clutched briefly at Rosie's heart. How could she ever compete with a girl, the very thought of whom made a man's eyes change color and his tone lose its luster?

"It must be wonderful," she thought, "to have men say 'Oh, hell,' that way about you!"

Aloud she murmured: "Wasn't Mary Strickland good to you?"

He laughed gratingly. "Good? She didn't know the meaning of the word. She was just a flirt through and through. All a man ever meant to her was a dance program. But, my Lord, she could dance!"

"Did you go with her much?"

"As much as I could. She was usually dated up for a month in advance—most popular girl on the campus. But I wouldn't have minded her playing around with other fellows—honest I wouldn't—if she hadn't sort of let me believe I meant something special to her. I suppose that was just her way of kidding me along, keeping me interested. Probably she did it with all the other fellows too." He grinned, and then went on seriously:

"But really, Rosie, she could be so

darned sweet, I actually thought once I was engaged to her. That was just before the Junior Prom. You see, I was secretary of the class and chairman of the music committee—I always was a great one to wangle musicians—and she'd picked me for the keenest date of the evening. And she knew I was crooked about her. She got an awful kick out of seeing me sappy!"

"Maybe," Rosie objected in a small voice; "maybe you're not quite fair to her. I bet she really did like you."

"Of course she liked me—she liked everybody. But she had a way of making a fellow feel she just couldn't live without him. Oh, there never was a girl who could pack a line like Mary's!"

"What is a Junior Prom?" Rosie asked, partly from wonder, and partly to distract him from memories of this girl, this strange, disturbing girl who had the colossal folly not to love him. "Is it anything like our dances here?"

He jerked back to the scene with a snap. "No, dear one," he said, "it isn't anything like the dances in El Bar, no cow-punchers, no homesteaders, no oil promoters, no dusty ducks of surveyors. In the first place, it's formal—soup and fish."

Her eyes widened and laughter bubbled to her lips. "My goodness, it certainly is different, isn't it? We just have cake and coffee here. Sometimes Miz Garry makes salad, but I don't think I ever saw soup at a party in El Bar."

He shouted at that. "My darling, precious Rosie Mooney! You're delicious. You ought to be patented. Soup and fish, my desert flower, are a spidery sort of clothes gents wear to formal parties under the impression they're dressed up. They are also known as tuxedos and dinner togs.

And in the case of professors, they are sometimes swallow tails."

IV

"OH!" cried Rosie, enlightened. "I know. I've seen them in pictures. And do the girls wear evening gowns all fluffy, frothy, without"—she lowered her voice and looked furtively around her—"without any sleeves?"

"Not a sleeve!" agreed Kenneth enthusiastically. "Their arms and shoulders are beautiful, and powdered, and as naked as Miz Garry's conversation."

Rosie blushed. "You shouldn't say 'naked' to me," she admonished. "It's not a nice word to use in mixed company."

"Pardon me! I meant 'nude,'" Kenneth corrected himself gravely.

"Oh!" said Rosie, a trifle convinced. "You know, I think they must be lovely—evening gowns, I mean. They must make you feel like a fairy or something. Hasn't that girl in the calendar got one on?" She pointed at the fly-specked memento of a grocery company which hung on the wall. The calendar portrayed a bland, blank creature, impossibly perfect, impeccably beautiful, with roses in her hair, and a sugary pink smirk upon her lips. Her astonishing shoulders were quite bare, save for a faint mist of chiffon.

"She has!" Kenneth affirmed. "A peach, too. Rosie, I think you'd be cute in an evening gown! Not *too* revealing, of course—you're just a bit thin, my angel. Quaintness would be more your line. Peach taffeta with an antebellum hooped skirt and a tight bodice. And there ought to be little prim knots of ribbon and tight bunches of flowers some place. Rosie dear, I can see you! You'd be adorable!"

"Would I?" she cried, ravished. Her dazzled eyes looked out the win-

dow, past the dingy street with Old Carson's dog scratching fleas before the bank, past the bridge above the noisy river, past the colored, chaotic hills and the blue mountains beyond, past everything to Cinderella's ball. She saw enchantment and magic, lights in crystal chandeliers and floors like black glass. She saw flowers and violins and a golden fountain with a diamond spray. She saw herself in a chalice of peach taffeta, while a cavalier knelt before her in satin and lace.

"You know," the boy said, "it's funny, but I really ought to be a designer. I thought up a dress for Mary Strickland once. She called it 'Flaming Youth,' but she went ahead and had it made the way I told her to. It was all little jagged ruffles the color of fire. She's a sort of gypsy type, anyway, and she was a perfect knock-out in that dress. But—she wore it to vamp another man!"

"I'll get your pie," Rosie said dully. A gypsy girl in a dress of flame—that was the kind men liked, the kind that lured them and held them—two thousand miles away.

"Listen, dear, I have an idea!" Kenneth cried when she came back with the triangle of pie. "Let's go to the Junior Prom to-night—you and I!"

"Is there one?" she cried, transported. "Where—in Antelope?"

"Well, roughly speaking, no," he answered. "But we can pretend there is. Didn't you ever play make-believe, Rosie?"

"Oh, yes. I used to play I was married to the sheriff."

"Now that," declared Kenneth, "takes imagination, knowing Bill Griggs as I do. Don't tell me, darling, you've imagined yourself married to Pete Heck!"

"No!" cried Rosie with deep fer-

vor. "But where are we going to pretend the Junior Prom is?"

"Right here in El Bar. The Geological Survey brawl. I shall call for you in the company Ford, and we'll pretend it's a limousine. We'll go up to the Elks' hall and pretend it's the Hotel Magnificent. We'll listen to Hallie Logan and pretend she's a Hawaiian orchestra — wouldn't that surprise her? You don't happen to have a date, do you, Rosebud?"

"N-no—I don't *think* so," said the girl uncertainly. "You see, Sandy Adams usually takes me. But he never asks me beforehand — he just shows up, and expects me to go with him."

"Then he has more faith in feminine constancy than I have. He's going to get a much-needed lesson. You leave him to me, my good woman! If he says anything warlike, I'll fix him. When shall I call for you—dear? That makes seven times I've called you 'dear,' doesn't it?"

"Nine," Rosie corrected gravely. "And then there've been three darlings and a few preciouuses. The dances here usually begin at eight thirty."

"Then I'll come around at nine—one is always late at the Junior Prom. No, I forgot, I'm the music committee. We'll have to go early and mend the piano bench some one broke at the last dance. We'll make it a quarter after eight. You'll be ready?"

"Sure. I'll kinda rush the diners through."

"All right," Kenneth proclaimed, pushing back his chair and rising. "I'll come for you in soup and fish. And you'll be wearing peach taffeta with blue ribbon. Until then, farewell."

V

LEFT alone, Rosie clasped the stack of dirty dishes to her breast and gazed

with unseeing eyes at the fly-specked calendar. "A date!" she breathed. "With *him!*"

"Well," said a thick voice behind her. "What's got you so attached to them dishes? Better bring 'em out to the kitchen and souse 'em—if you can part with 'em that long."

"Oh, Miz Garry, I'm sorry!" The girl turned flushed and confused to the unkempt figure who accosted her. "I'm clearing up just as fast as I can, honest."

"Seems like this young whipper-snapper's got you sorta hypnotized," commented her employer. "You been sitting there mooning at him for nearly an hour. Mooney—you're sure well named."

"I wasn't mooning," Rosie remarked with some dignity.

"No?" the slattern asked. "Well, excuse me. Of course I was only judging by appearances."

"I—he's gonna take me to the dance to-night!" the girl confessed, too joyous, too dazzled, too utterly bewitched to be resentful.

"Him? Why, what will Sandy say?"

"I don't know," Rosie declared recklessly. "I can't see he has anything to say. He hasn't asked me himself. He never does. He just has too much faith in feminine constancy. He's going to get a much-needed lesson."

"H-m. Well. It's your funeral. I never could see it was a very good way to hold a man, giving him lessons."

"But I'm not trying to hold Sandy. I don't think me and Sandy are suited to each other. Not in some ways. You see, Miz Garry, I'm more worldly than Sandy is. I guess I'm sort of cosmopolitan."

"You are?" The landlady studied

her through narrowed eyes. "Who told you so? That mutt of a surveyor?"

Rosie's cheeks flamed, but she held her ground. "You hadn't ought to insult Kenneth Gray that way. He's perfectly wonderful and you don't understand. Nobody around here can ever understand him. He—he's *different*. He takes lemon with his tea. Nobody else in El Bar does that—'cept me. I'm just worldly in my ways—sort of. Kinda what you call sophisticated. I mean I've never been any place much, but I've read a lot, and I can't help knowing there's other ways of living."

She gulped in her excitement, and went on.

"Why, some places the men wear soup and fish to parties, and the girls have dresses without any sleeves! There's places where people play tennis and have yachts and ride horseback just for fun, and don't work. It 'll sound silly to you, Miz Garry, but I'm homesick for those places, even if I've never seen 'em." Very proud and pitiful she stood, while the platter that had once contained roast beef, well done, tipped dangerously in her arms and the cup teetered hysterically.

The knotted, yellow hand of Miz Garry reached out and folded the dirty tablecloth into tiny, careful pleats.

"When I was eighteen," she said strangely, "I wanted to be a court favorite in Paris, France. I wanted to dance with a duke. And I was sort of set apart from the neighbors because I ate with my fork."

Queer, unwilling tears swam to Rosie's eyes. Miz Garry having dreams! Why, that was awful! It was ghastly—this raddled, mottled creature daring to think of dukes. Impulsively she put down the dishes and

slipped her arm across those defeated, cheated shoulders.

"I'm sorry," she whispered. "If I ever get to Paris I'll bring you back something."

The woman smiled, her sudden, brilliant smile that brought a rift of April light to her ravaged face, the smile, perhaps, that had kept Cap Givens faithful forty years.

"You're a nice kid," she murmured. "A little touched sometimes, but that's because you're so young—so damned young. What you going to wear to-night?"

A shadow came to Rosie's eyes. "I don't know," she brooded. "I haven't got a thing. How long does it take to dye dresses?"

"Oh, quite a while. You have to boil them several hours. Why?"

"I'd like to have something peach colored. Kenneth says I'd be adorable in peach taffeta. Of course I couldn't get taffeta, but I thought I might dye that old white organdie. Its skirt stands all cute and bustly, and I could put a blue ribbon and some little flowers on it. Kenneth thinks quaintness is my line."

The woman's glance traveled thoughtfully over the slender, limpid figure of the girl.

"How tall are you?" she asked.

"Five feet and two inches," Rosie answered wonderingly.

"H-m," muttered the other. "Well, gather up them dishes and start washing them. We'll probably have quite a crowd to-night." Heavily she shuffled back to the kitchen, her slippers scuffing and slapping on the floor like the little waves of an outgoing tide.

VI

BUT the door into the lobby came open again and another figure stood

there, a slim, bronze giant of a man, heavily covered with dust, but showing a certain dark bloom beneath, a man in flannel shirt and leather chaps, with little silver wheels on his feet.

"Sandy!" cried the girl. "My, you like to scared me out of my skin! When did you get to town?"

"Just now. I came in for a shave and a hair cut. Pete barbered me last time, but he seems to think he's sort of an understudy to a butcher. He liked to cut my ear off. I told him this wasn't no season for dehorning. And the boss had some business for me to do, so I just loped in a little early. How you feeling?"

"Oh, fine," said Rosie politely; "how're you?"

"Fine. Only I've had kind of a shock."

"Shock? Why, what's happened?"

"Reddy Cullen's left."

"He has? Who's goin' to be the new foreman at the Bar F?"

"That's what shocks me so," the cow-puncher confessed. "They've got the damnedest foreman! A tall, shock-headed, locoed sort of guy named Sandy Adams."

"Sandy! Why, ain't that grand? Ain't you proud of yourself?"

"Plumb stuck-up," the tall horseman grinned. "I've had three new hats since last night."

"Well, I should think you *would!* It means more pay and everything, don't it?"

"Yeah, that's what tickles me. More pay. It happens to mean a lot to me—right now." His eyes, deep blue in his brown face, looked levelly into hers. She felt her color rising and glanced hastily away.

"That's just grand," she babbled again, confused and a little frightened.

He twirled his wide, soft hat be-

tween his fingers and grinned. "Well," he said, "I got to be going along. Just thought I'd drop in for a minute. By the way, I aim to take you to that dance to-night."

A little guiltily, a little proudly, she lifted her chin.

"I'm right sorry, Sandy, but I've got a date to-night."

"You have? The devil!"

"Yes," she said kindly. "I'm going with Kenneth Gray."

"Oh! That surveyor kid. Since when have you been chasing around with him?"

"Oh, I haven't been. That is, not exactly. But he's been taking his meals here, and he just happened to invite me to this dance. The survey boys are giving it, you know."

"Well, that's plumb bad luck for me, ain't it?"

"I'm sorry, Sandy. Honest, I am. But you see, you never asked me to go with you. How'd I even know you'd want me to?"

"You knew," the cow-puncher stated. "But I ain't blaming you none for taking a date with Gray. Serves me right for not riding herd closer. At least save me a dance, won't you?"

"Sure, Sandy. Say, listen. I heard that Gladys Garnett ain't got a date."

"Fine! I'll look her up. Thanks for the tip—Gladys is a real good dancer. See you later, Rosie."

"Sure. Good-by." She watched him go, with a strange feeling in the pit of her stomach. She had always hated Gladys Garnett.

"And won't she think she's smart now?" Rosie reflected bitterly. "Running around with the foreman of the Bar F!"

And then she thought of Kenneth, and all else vanished from her mind. Handsome, handsome Kenneth!

"He's the most interesting man I ever knew!" she confided to Miz Garry, as she plunged great stacks of greasy plates into a tub of suds. "He says the most comical things. And he's been places! And he knows people—just *wonderful* people! And he's got the prettiest teeth!"

"Teeth!" the hotel keeper snorted. "A body'd think you were a dentist! Hello, cap," she nodded amiably as her wistful, white-haired admirer appeared in the doorway. "Come in and decorate a chair."

"I'll wipe dishes for Rose," he offered, getting a towel out of the cupboard. "How you been, Molly?"

"Thirsty," she said, and winked. "Powerful thirsty, cap."

"We can fix that," he offered. "The sheriff gave me a nice, tall bottle with something in it."

"God bless the sheriff," Miz Garry intoned piously. "Did you ever stop to think what a hopeless world this would be without sheriffs?"

VII

ROSIE washed dishes and wondered, and wondered and washed dishes. Miz Garry had dreamed of Paris, Miz Garry who ran a frowzy eating house and took sly drinks on the side, Miz Garry who got quite drunk sometimes when things went badly. But probably Miz Garry had never had a man like Kenneth Gray in her life, a man who could make a common dance a Junior Prom.

"Say, girly, I got a surprise for you," the woman said, when she had scoured the last pan and hung up the dripping rag. "You stand right there and shut your eyes. I'll be back in a minute. Cap, you watch her, so she don't peek."

Mysteriously she shuffled away, and

then was heard shuffling back again.

"Now," she commanded, "shoot!"

Rosie's eyelids flew open and her breath caught startled in her throat. There across the flabby, faded arm of Miz Garry was a dress, a lovely hooped and ruffled dress, pink taffeta with a funny tight bodice and dim blue ribbons. It was a little crumpled, perhaps, and certainly it was noisome of moth balls, but it had the witchery of youth and gayety and tiny, fluted ruffles.

"Oh!" the girl breathed, going down on her knees before it.

"It ain't peach, exactly," Miz Garry worried, "but pink's about the same thing. And it's got blue ribbons. You go try it on, and if it fits, I'll press it out for you. I was just about your size and build when—when that dress was new. And you see that style now a good deal in the fashion magazines."

"You—you're *good*, Miz Garry!" the girl whispered, and slipped off, dancing, to try on the dress. It did fit. Slim and provocative, it clasped Rosie's lithe young waist, enchantingly it swirled and dipped about her. "I'll pick some wild roses on the prairie west of town," she whispered, "and pin them here and here and here!" Radiantly she ran back to Miz Garry and old Givens to show them her pink-cheeked, star-eyed loveliness.

They both fell silent when they saw her; it almost seemed they turned a little pale. It was as if they saw not Rosie Mooney, but that other girl who was after many years to become Miz Garry, that other girl who was handsome Molly Slater, the belle of the great North Platte. It was in this dress she had jilted Captain Givens, it was in this dress she had eloped with Tennessee Danvers, sweet spoken, white handed gentleman gambler, who

had promised her Paris and left her in Chicago.

"It—fits real well, doesn't it?" Miz Garry said at last, her faded eyes looking even dimmer than before.

"Very sweet," the old banjo player murmured, "very, very—sweet." His fingers reached out and touched the coarse hand of the woman who had never been a sullen, drunken sloven to him, but always dashing Molly Slater.

"I'm going to look in that mirror in the lobby," Rosie bubbled. "Somehow it shows more of you than the other glasses do."

Blithely she left them, the old, daft lovers, quite tipsy now, and surveyed her pinkness and her quaintness in the spotted full-length mirror between the cash register and the oleander plant. Truly she was lovely. No one could say she wasn't pretty now.

It was here that Kenneth Gray found her when he dashed in, hot and dusty, from the street outside. In his hand he carried the sinister yellow omen of a telegram. Rosie's heart sank. Telegrams always meant bad news in El Bar.

"Rosebud," he said, seizing her hand, "I hope you won't think I'm ditching you, but truth is, I've just got to break that date to-night. I'm sorry. Honest, I am. We'll make it some other time. We'll get in lots of Junior Proms before the summer is over."

"That's all right," she said bravely, her eyes on the fatal thing in his hand. "Did you get bad news?"

He grinned and winked at her. "Not exactly bad!" he said. "This is a wire from Mary Strickland. She gets into Buffalo Wallow to-night on her way to Morton's dude ranch. Fine nerve she has with her! Orders me to meet her train and take her to dinner.

See how she signs herself, 'love and pash, Mary.' There never was a kid who could pack a line like hers! See you later, Rosie. Got to scamper now—forty miles is a devil of a sprint to meet a train! Dead sorry about the dance, sweetness!"

The door slammed and he was gone—oh, horribly gone! He was terribly, irretrievably gone; gone to that other girl who simply pulled a string and made him dance to her bidding like a helpless puppet.

Dry-lipped, wide-eyed, Rosie faced herself in the mirror. Life has moments like this for little waitresses who dare to dream of young surveyors. Shakily she smoothed the soft, pink folds of the frock she wore.

"His dress!" she murmured. "And he never even noticed!"

VIII

SUDDENLY she flung herself against the glass and broke into sobs, her pink, wet cheek pressed to her own reflection, while the oleander blossoms drooped fragrant heads in pity.

It was here that Sandy found her. Very simply the tall cow-puncher crossed the room and gathered the little huddle in his arms.

"Why, Rosie, honey!" he said. "What's happened? Can't you tell old Sandy?"

Her arms crept about his neck. "Sandy," she whispered, "have you asked Gladys Garnett yet to go to the dance?"

"No," he said scornfully, "and I never meant to. I don't like a girl without *any* brains!"

"I—I'll go with you," she offered faintly, "if you still want me."

"Want you? I came back on purpose to try my luck again. You see, I was in the post office when Kenneth

Gray got that telegram. I just thought he might be called out of town, so I followed him up here. Say, that's a cute dress you got. Makes you look like a—like a flower, kind of. Wild roses, you know. Why, isn't that funny — your name's Rose! It suits you."

"So does Mooney," she mumbled sadly.

Sandy's arm tightened about her. "Are you so *awful* disappointed not to go with him?" he whispered.

She could not hurt Sandy when he spoke in that voice.

"N-no," she said, "it's just that—that we were making a sort of game out of it. And I thought he was terribly exciting. He called me 'dear.'"

"That," said Sandy scornfully, "ain't nothing to what I could call you if I tried. Isn't there something else

about him, kid, that you kind of hanker for?"

"Well," she mused, "he was something like lemon in tea."

"Lemon?" he asked, puzzled. She smiled a little wryly into his flannel chest.

"Yes," she told him, "some folks back east—real swells, you know—take lemon in their tea instead of cream."

"They *do*?" He was dumfounded.

Over his shoulder her eyes for a tear-drenched moment sought the calendar with the beautiful girl in evening dress. Lingeringly she looked on that bland, perfect face, that pink, impossible smile, that frail mist of chiffon. Then her lips tightened and her head lifted gamely.

"But me," Rosie Mooney said in a stern voice, "I always take cream."



A REPROACH

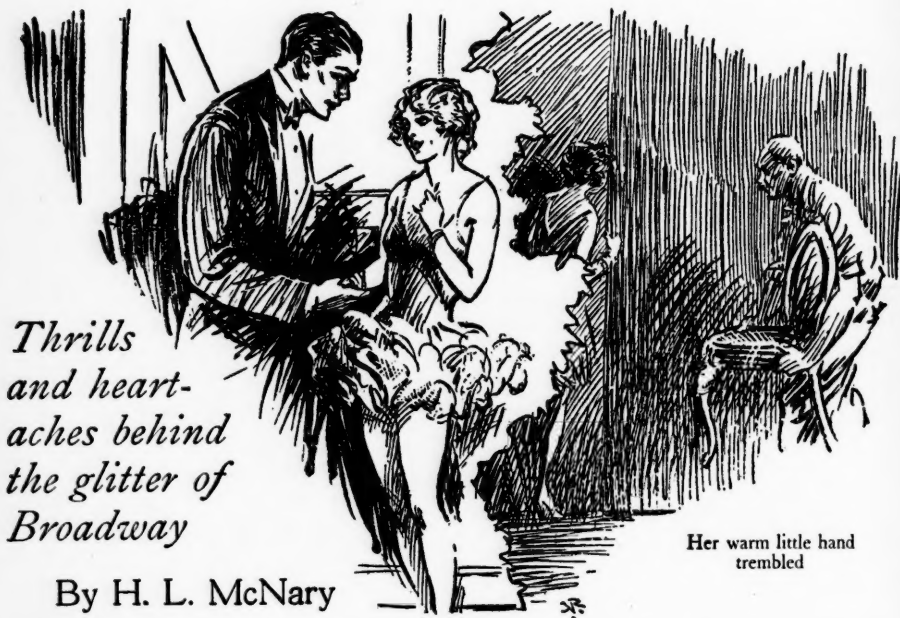
THE room is ablaze with countless lights,
The faces catch the glow;
Like the song of hidden water sprites
The rhythmic waltz strains flow.
And I am one of a dozen men
Who bow before your throne.
Ah, Rosalie, I remember when
I was the only one!

Last summer I was the only one
Who waited for your smile—
When we rowed about the lake alone,
And tramped for many a mile.
Then there were dozens of girls around
As fair as they could be,
Yet in my eyes you were always found
The only one for me.

Now, when I ask for a single dance
You hand to me your card—
Ah, sweet indeed is that smile and glance
But fate is very hard;
For every dance on your card is gone—
There's not an empty line,
And a certain "F" has five alone—
What! Are those dances mine?

Flavel Scott Mines.

The Little Hooper



*Thrills
and heart-
aches behind
the glitter of
Broadway*

By H. L. McNary

Her warm little hand
trembled

BOX lights on either side of the stage billed them as "Martin and Juanita." A baptismal record in Brooklyn registered him as Martin O'Hare—"Marty" to his friends at the club; while over in Weehawken, near the dance hall in which he had "discovered" Juanita, neighbors thought of her as Rosa, one of the numerous Marillos—"the wild one what had gone on the stage."

To-night, before silken draperies, they floated in a bath of soft lights.

"C'mon, snap out of it! This is a dance, not a tug of war!" hissed Marty, during their feature dance.

Neither lost step even momentarily.

Through a smile that masked her real feelings Juanita glared at him, and from behind a similar frozen smile he returned the glare with interest.

There came the crescendo flare of music and the whirling pivot of a final bid for the Palace and Broadway. The stage manager stood in the wings. Not a spark of warmth emanated from the watery eyes and the veined and baggy features of the man whose verdict ranked with Nero's thumb.

A smattering of applause brought the dancers out for a bow. Marty felt the fingers in his hand straining away from him. Anger quickened his pulse, but he bowed and smiled and came out once again before darkness smothered the stage.

"Well!" he began, as soon as he and Juanita got beyond the stage manager.

"Aw, go get a sponge and mop yourself up," cut in the girl. "Why take it out on me, if we didn't go over? I did the steps, didn't I?"

She started to climb the steel helix that led to their dressing rooms.

"Steps is only part of the act, like I told you plenty," replied Marty. "You got to create poysonality."

"Blueberries! What's poysonality, anyway?"

"How the hell do I know? It's like smallpox. You know it when you got it—and so does every one else."

They reached the top of the narrow staircase, but did not turn into their rooms.

"We had it at foist," persisted Marty, "when we broke in. You played up to me then. Now you're fightin' me for the footlights, and the audience gets wise. We ain't a team no more—we're rivals. The audience likes to feel that dancin' partners are in love."

The carmine lips curled away from pearly teeth.

"In love with you? I'd have to be hard up!"

"That's a two-way street, sister. If I ever tumble for a hooper, the sanity bugs can park me in a padded boudoir without a yip from this baby. You're the sixth, and I'm pickin' 'em wise each time."

"Yeah?"

"Yes, yeah! You got to make believe you're in love with me while we're out front. The farthest you can stay away from me off stage will be too close; but for a few minutes every day you might act as if you could take me without a chaser, even if it hoits. I tell you, audiences like to get romantic about dancin' teams. Look at the big ones what broke up. Did any of

'em go over with new partners? No! Why? They dance just as good, but the romance and poysonality was missin'. If you'd played up to me to-night, Shuman would 'a' booked us for the Palace, and in a couple o' weeks Ziggy and Georgie White would 'a' been trailin' us with contracts; but you're like the rest, dishin' me when the big chance comes!"

Juanita's silvered toe tapped the concrete floor.

"Yeah?" she said scornfully.

"Yeah! Look at Ina Ray in 'Shipmates' with my steps, and the others, too—double crossin' me, and then not even givin' me credit!"

"Well, I don't have to smoke cigarettes blindfolded to give you testimonials. I can help myself."

Marty lowered his head.

"Oh, that's it! That's why Bennie Osterman followed us around the subway! I s'pose you sold yourself sight unseen. He just went to the shows for relaxation."

Juanita whirled from his sarcasm with a billow of her flimsy costume.

"How long didja think I was goin' to hang on with a flat tire like you?" she tossed over a naked shoulder. "I should pass up a chance with Bennie just to stick to you!"

She slammed the door on him. Marty turned into his own cubby-hole.

"Damn women!" he muttered, as he slumped into a chair in front of his grease-stained mirror. "They're all alike—a bunch of double crossin' ingrates!"

II

MARTY'S cynicism was justified, for each succeeding partner had run almost identically true to form, and in each instance, blinded by the prospect of finally reaching Broadway, he had been

caught napping. His five former associates had all gone ahead to stardom or brilliant marriages, while he, the man who quarried them in the rough and polished each facet of appeal, remained in the sticks, appearing all around Broadway, but never on it. Attractive enough in appearance, with his dark features and pleasing profile, he lacked the elusive quality of "personality" that would enable him to go it alone; but with the right partner he knew for a certainty that he could give the best of dancing teams a run for their money.

Being "at liberty," as Marty's profession puts it when the ghost refuses to stroll, Marty drifted back to Brooklyn and dropped in at the club, a splendid monument to fraternity facing Prospect Park.

"Thank God I'm in one place where they don't allow women!" he proclaimed, as he bought a book of tickets at the grille.

"Some woman ditch you?" laughed the man behind the desk.

"And how!" affirmed Marty, but offered no details.

He ordered his dinner and headed with his tray toward an unoccupied table, but the Traynor brothers saw him and called him over. Bill Traynor usually managed the club benefits, in which Marty regularly appeared.

"How'd you get away to-night?" asked Bill.

"Oh, I closed the bookin' and I'm takin' a rest," explained Marty as he set his tray down. "Wanta eat?"

"No, we just packed away a feed at home," replied Eddie.

"Wish I could wrap myself around some home food for a change," sighed Marty. He looked at the chunky Bill. "You're a good ad for your mother's cookin'."

A shade passed over Bill's cheerful features, and the permanent smile on the boyish Eddie slipped behind a cloud.

"My mother died three years ago," explained Bill. "Marilyn keeps house for us."

"Older sister?" asked Marty.

"No—she's the youngest."

"Only twenty," supplemented Eddie, with a grin; "but, boy, how she can cook! You ought to sink your molars into her biscuits."

"I'd like to," said Marty innocently.

"Why don't you come up to the house to-morrow night?" invited Bill earnestly.

"No, no," protested Marty. "The kid's got enough to do."

"Aw, she likes company," exclaimed the youthful Eddie, positively but without authority. "Bill can pick you up at Wall."

As Marty, accompanied by Bill Traynor, climbed the stairs of the apartment house, his speculations centered on the coming meal, to the exclusion of the young woman who was to provide the home repast. Just then out of the kitchen and into the dim hall came a slip of a girl, who adjusted a flowered apron and looked up at him with an awed thrill.

"The kid sister, Marty," introduced Bill.

"'Kid' is right," thought Marty, as he acknowledged the introduction.

Perhaps it was Marilyn Traynor's complexion, so smooth and delicately tinted, that made her appear unusually youthful, or perhaps it was her eyes of powdered blue, so like a doll's; but most of all was she revealed by her almost childish *naïveté*. Marty, and what he was, an actor and a professional dancer, dazzled her, and she did not attempt to conceal it.

"You look almost the same as you do on the stage," she exclaimed breathlessly. "Eddie took me to see you when Betty Boyce was your partner. She's engaged to marry an English nobleman, isn't she?"

"I didn't know it," replied Marty, "but I don't doubt it. They mostly do. If I could get a commission on what my ex-partners knock off, I'd be sittin' pretty now."

"Why don't you grab one of 'em yourself?" suggested Bill.

"Not me!" laughed Marty. "I'm too wise to fall for a hooper. It's all business with me."

Eddie Traynor came into the hall and saw Marty studying Marilyn. He teasingly ruffled her copper-gold hair.

"What do you think of little Red-head, Marty?"

"Red!" protested Marty. "She's a blonde."

He was rewarded with a grateful glance, and Eddie received a *moue* as Marilyn returned to the kitchen.

An elder brother joined them at the table, but the father, Marty learned, had dined earlier. Something light and dainty might have been expected from a girl as youthful as Marilyn, but the steaming consommé, the huge piece of steak, and the mountain of mashed potatoes set before Marty caused him to look at her in amazement.

Marilyn sat down with the guest and her brothers, and lent a picnic touch to the routine of home eating. No wonder, sighed Marty wistfully, the Traynor boys appeared so contented.

The supper over—no one thought to call it dinner—Eddie helped his sister to clear the table, while Marty went to the piano in the parlor and played show airs. Marilyn came in after a few moments and sat near him.

"Do you sing?" Marty asked.

"Sure she does," replied Eddie, grinning at her embarrassment.

"Eddie, I don't!" she cried in panic.

"Well, anyway, you dance. Get up and show Marty some new steps."

"Why not dance with Marty?" suggested Bill Traynor. "We can get a dance number on the radio."

"That's the racket!" exclaimed Marty eagerly.

He could teach the kid some of his pet steps. She would like that.

Eddie, determined not to let his sister escape, leaped across to the radio. Marilyn turned frightened eyes upon Marty as he rose from the piano. The thought of dancing with a professional alarmed her, but she rose obediently as the strains of muted dance music drifted from the loud-speaker.

As soon as Marty placed his hand at the small of Marilyn's back, and felt her relax, he recognized that grace which is as much a God-sent gift as a beautiful voice. She followed perfectly as he glided around the little parlor. She was still a little apprehensive, but a thrill of pleasure heightened her color.

"I'll say you can dance!" applauded Marty, as the number ended. "That's good music, too."

"Arturo Romez speaking, from the Casa Ramona," sounded the voice of the announcer.

"Casa Ramona!" repeated Marilyn, turning to her brother Eddie. "That's where you were going to take me." She tossed her head. "I don't know whether I ought to go with you now."

"Don't," begged Marty suddenly. "Go with me!"

He had asked himself how he could repay the Traynors for their hospitality, and he knew that he could best succeed in pleasing the brothers by doing something for their sister. He

would give her a night of nights— atmosphere, wonderful music, delicious food, and a chance to dance as she had never danced before. Perhaps, too, they might meet some celebrity of his profession, one who had scaled the top and didn't high-hat his former pals on the lower rungs. Marty saw the girl at his side dazzled by the prospect, her eyes bright, and her cheeks glowing.

"Oh, I'd love to!" she cried.

III

Two nights later Marty called for Marilyn. An expensive topcoat covered his neatly tailored evening attire as he held her fur wrap for her. A more sophisticated girl, he reflected, would have left him cooling his heels for at least a few minutes, but Marilyn had evidently been ready long before his coming.

"We can ride to Atlantic and take the Seventh Avenue," she suggested.

"Seventh Avenue nothing, kid! We take a taxi."

He wasn't more than seven years her senior, but he felt paternal—no, like a big brother. Bill and Eddie Traynor didn't know their luck in having a kid sister like Marilyn!

The interior of the Casa Ramona resembled a Cuban *patio*. Marilyn halted abruptly on the stone stairs descending to the courtyard and gave herself completely to the scene before her. Marty paused a step below, but he watched her. A smile played on his lips as he noted how ingenuously the girl revealed her emotions by the parting of her lips, the heightening of her color, and the widening of her eyes.

Marilyn saw a setting inclosed by what seemed to be the walls of apartments. From behind barred and glassless windows came a faint twang of

musical instruments and a mysterious whispering and rustling that conveyed the impression of unseen inmates. Tables stood here and there among palms and potted plants. At a far corner of the dance floor a fountain sang, spraying silvery drops that sparkled softly in a bath of multicolored lights. Above, in a man-made sky of midnight blue, stars twinkled and gossamer clouds drifted over.

Marty touched the girl's arm, and she returned from her reverie. After they had checked their wraps, a waiter dressed in a white tuxedo conducted them to a table near the dancing floor. If he had the Broadway tag upon him, Marty reflected with a bitterness which he skillfully concealed, the waiter would have ushered them to a booth; but Marilyn would not know that.

Marty ordered for both, Marilyn begging him to do so, and while they waited for their oyster cocktail he pointed out the few celebrities present at this early hour. He did so with a casual familiarity that impressed the girl, but secretly he yearned to be able to exchange some sign of mutual recognition with these professional stars. He had as much talent as they, and more than some of them; but they had slipped into the magic incandescence of Broadway, while he floundered in the penumbra of the subway circuits. If it hadn't been for that double-crossing wop, and that cold-blooded Greta, and—but he mustn't bring them into this party. He was here to give the kid a good time.

"Come on, youngster! The music calls—let's shake an ankle!"

Behind a screen of palms Arturo Romez was leading his orchestra in a modulated fox trot. Couples were already on the floor when Marty placed his arm about Marilyn. For a mo-

ment he felt her tremble with nervous excitement. Then he saw her look up at him with a trusting smile—just a fleeting smile, but it did strange things to Marty, and left him wondering at his own feelings.

"Oh, that was marvelous!" breathed the happy Marilyn, as the music ended.

Marty grinned in delight at her pleasure. He had meant to give her the dance of her life, and he had succeeded.

"Well, you're a wonderful partner," he assured her politely. Suddenly he realized how much truth reposed in the thoughtless comment. "I mean it," he insisted fervently. "You followed so perfectly I forgot we hadn't had weeks of practice. Why, with most women I had to work out for a month before I'd trust a bookin' with them—on the level, kid!"

Marilyn laughed deprecatingly as they sat down at their table again.

"Oh, I could never dance like your partners," she protested, dazed by the utter impossibility.

"Dancin' is only part of the act," he informed her authoritatively. "You can teach almost any woman how to step, but she's got to have poysonality to go over."

"What's that?"

Marty laughed.

"Yeah, why is an oyster? Poysonality is different in different people. No two partners I picked was alike, but they all had somethin' that made people fall hard—and God help them what fell too hard!"

The waiter placed some *harino con leche de Santiago* before them. Marilyn, eating slowly, looked up after a few minutes of silence.

"Marty, did you ever get interested in any of your partners?"

A Victorian blush suffused her cheeks, and it deepened as Marty peered at her with corrugated brow. Then he understood, and laughed.

"You mean, did I fall for them? Listen, kid—I only take a professional interest in my partners. Me fall for a hooper? Not old Marty!"

The orchestra started again. A windy howl from the saxophones was followed by a *créscendo* drum roll. Marty's head came up.

"'Above the Clouds,'" he cried. "That's the number me and Juanita did, with the aviation steps I invented. Let's go, kid!"

In his eagerness he practically lifted Marilyn out of her seat, and he swept her out on the floor with a whirling pivot followed by a bank and a glide. Other patrons, moving leisurely toward the dance floor, supposed they were intruding upon a specialty, and turned back.

The proprietor of the Casa Ramona, Max Frolin, advanced quickly toward the orchestra. He wore a black tuxedo to distinguish him from his personnel. Short and thin-waisted, he seemed scarcely more than a boy; but he had given nearly a score of years to theaters, night clubs, and kindred associations. He knew all about the attempts of amateurs to steal the spotlight, and his sharp, beady eyes gleamed with anger as he saw his floor monopolized.

Arturo Romez, with baton poised, watched his employer's slender white hand. The hand remained suspended, and then dropped without a gesture. The music continued. Frolin's eyes still gleamed, but his anger had departed.

Marilyn had permitted herself to become blissfully immersed in the complicated movements through which her

talented partner guided her so cleverly. Her lips were parted, her eyes enraptured. Then, abruptly, with appalling fright, she saw that she and Marty had the floor to themselves.

"Oh, we're alone!" she gasped in panic.

Only then did Marty realize that he was providing an unannounced exhibition. Well, that was all in a day's work for him; but for the kid—what a thrill he was giving her!

"Not alone, kid! Old Marty's with you."

His hand tightened reassuringly about her waist. She looked up, frightened but trusting, trembling but dancing magically. Baby, how this kid could step! Too bad she didn't have "poysontology," like Juanita, who inflamed men with her smoldering fire; like Greta Hansen, whose blond gelidness challenged masculine ardor to arouse her; like Ina Ray, with her sinuous walk and provocative smile. The kid had none of these tricks.

A final pivot as the music ceased and the dance was over. Applause greeted the dancers. It was generous appreciation, but Marty, schooled to calibrate the enthusiasm of an audience, found nothing significant in the handclapping. It startled Marilyn, however. Blushing and clutching desperately at his hand, she turned to him with a look of frightened incomprehension.

An actress might have spent a lifetime before a mirror trying to catch just that air of ingenuousness. The showman in Marty recognized its value instantly. Max Frolin was a showman, too. Few among the diners shared this instinct, but all responded to Marilyn's artless embarrassment and modest subordination to her partner. Her look proclaimed its genuineness. It made eyes glisten and throats feel

lumpy—and hands banged together as an escape from emotion, as much as in tribute to the dancers.

As the storm of applause increased, Marilyn's confusion mounted. Frolin, sensing the proper moment, signed to Romez for an encore; but the calculating proprietor permitted only one repetition, despite the insistent applause.

Max met the flushed couple as they came off the floor.

"Come into my office," he ordered coldly, fixing gleaming and imperious eyes upon Marty O'Hare.

Marty refused to be disconcerted, however. He ushered Marilyn to her seat, and then followed Frolin into the proprietor's office.

"How much?" asked Max, with his back against the door.

"What am I supposed to be?" parried Marty. "A dry agent?"

"How much?" cut in Frolin crisply.

"You got me wrong, Max. This ain't a stunt. I just come in with the kid—"

"Yeah? I could stall, too—needed some one to fill in—might give you a trial; but I'm callin' instead of bluffin'. You pulled a neat play. You planned it poifectly—months ago, maybe. Well, this is once it woiked. The kid's got appeal. How much?"

When Marty came back to the scared Marilyn, his smile reassured her. He tossed a paper in front of her.

"Kid, that says you get a hundred berries a week just to dance here a couple o' times a night."

"Oh, but I couldn't!" Marty's heart stopped beating at the earnestness of her protest, but clicked again as she explained in the same breath: "I'm not good enough."

"Yeah? Listen, kid, you're tellin' that to the guy what's always picked winners. That paper reads for two

weeks, and I could 'a' been out here ten minutes ago if I'd made it three months. That guy Frolin is nobody's ward, but Marty knows his Bermudas."

"But I'll be frightened to death," persisted Marilyn.

"And ain't I hopin' so!"

IV

THE Casa Ramona enjoyed two weeks of unprecedented prosperity; but Max Frolin's delight was hardly worth the price of his despair when he failed in getting the contract renewed. Marty accepted, as the best of several offers, an engagement with "Flying High." He was on Broadway at last, even if only in a number crowded into a popular revue; and after the first appearance of the new dancers—billed under their own names—those responsible for "Flying High" sat up until the following noon consuming coffee and cigarettes while they took the show to pieces and put it together again about Marty and Marilyn.

Marty lived in fear that familiarity would soon professionalize Marilyn; but in everything save her dancing she remained the nervous schoolgirl called to the platform to perform. Night after night his heart ached as he waited with her in the wings, holding her moist little hand reassuringly, until the moment when he slipped his arm about her waist and swept her out upon the brilliantly lighted stage. Her appealing eagerness to make good and her absolute trust in him communicated themselves to the audience; and then, as the dance ended, he saw again the embarrassed look that had brought the house down at the Casa Ramona directed first at the spectators and then at him, as if to say:

"All that applause can't be for me. It must be for you!"

Marilyn loved every minute of it. The stage, to her, remained a fairyland, and never could the pallid backs of sets, the clutter of ropes and braces, or the sight of calloused scene-shifters creating effects enforce their evidence of disillusionment upon her. Audiences warmed to her childlike appeal, and the girls of the revue, many of them two and three years Marilyn's junior, petted and patronized her. Marty hovered about her with a brotherly interest—or, at least, he supposed it such.

On the first Saturday night he knocked on the door of her dressing room, and, just as on the other nights of the week, a cheery welcome bade him enter. Just as on the other nights, too, he scowled at the masses of flowers that pervaded the room with mingled fragrance and a riot of color. There were orchids in pastel shades, roses of the deepest red and most lustrous white, a huge pillow of moon gold chrysanthemums—Marty refused to look. He kicked aside a heap of cardboard boxes and waxed paper, and crossed to where Marilyn sat before her table.

"What's this?" he demanded savagely, as he picked up a string of pearls from its nest of blue plush.

Marilyn laughed and handed him a note. He read:

May I have the incomparable happiness of seeing you wear these this evening while I sit across from you at some table in—

"Send it back!" roared Marty, dropping the pearls as if they might be some lethal Borgia gift, and shrinking back from the flowers as if they were from the poisoned garden of Rappaccini. "Send all this stuff back!" he insisted frantically.

"Don't even acknowledge it. These

Broadway oat planters ought to get hung for givin' such things to a kid like you!"

"But—I'm nineteen—almost twenty," Marilyn reminded him, as she studied him closely, far more interested in his agitation than in the gifts or the unknown donors.

"I don't care how old you are. You're Bill Traynor's sister. I got you into this. Suppose anything should happen!"

"What could happen, Marty?"

Marilyn merely asked a question, but this demand for an explanation annoyed Marty.

"Never mind! Just do what I tell you. Don't have anything to do with any one unless I say so."

Marty left the dressing room, his good-natured countenance shadowed by a scowl. Marilyn, with one slippersed toe swinging gayly, wriggled around in her seat. She folded her hands on the back of the chair, rested a cheek on her forearms, and stared at the door with wide, dreamy eyes. Then with a little birdlike laugh she sprang to her feet and performed a pirouette.

Next she dropped back into her chair again, and, with her legs curled up beneath her, stared into her mirror.

"Oh, Marty!" she laughed. "You're funny!"

In the days that followed Marty guarded Marilyn as if every bareheaded youth who owned a raccoon coat and a speedy roadster was planning to rush her into a front-page scandal. No dour duenna could have watched over a coquettish *señorita* more zealously. He made no distinctions. Any male who attempted by any method, fair or foul, to communicate with Marilyn automatically elected himself to Marty's blacklist of decadent youth.

Marilyn seemed content with the arrangement, but other members of the revue argued in groups, back stage, as to her partner's motives. Marty realized their interest, and was sedulously careful to give no clew to the curious.

One night Grace Taylor stepped in from the street and discovered Marty, alone and off guard, reading a thumb-tacked notice on the bulletin board. The stage was set for the first skit. Carpenters were downstairs or out of sight. It was that breath-catching moment of ghostly silence before the commencement of the evening's frivolity.

Grace Taylor was the principal who had suffered most in the slashing necessary to fatten Marilyn's part, but she bore the girl no resentment. A greater tribute than this no one could ask. Before her agitating green eyes, her tossing red tresses, and her talking songs had registered on Broadway, Grace had frequently been on the same billing with Marty. This afforded an excuse to be familiar—if she needed any excuse.

"Lo, Marty!" she opened up. "You're so busy playin' nursemaid these days that if I didn't send out for a program I'd think you'd left us. Thought you only took a professional interest in your partners."

Marty turned so quickly that he caught the gleam in the green eyes in time to school himself.

"That's all I have," he parried lightly.

"Yeah?" drawled Grace, angry at having betrayed her curiosity. "The way you hang over that kid makes me think you've been studyin' some private cuttin's of John Gilbert."

"That's part of the act, Grace, old sock. It's psychology—but you can't even spell that."

"Why should I, when I know easier

words to tag you with?" The green eyes focused carefully to catch the slightest play of emotion. "Then I suppose some day you'll shift the spotlight on this Payton Irving that you've been holdin' up, and you'll let the kid grab him off."

Marty bent closer, as if to read the notice better.

"Which one is that, Grace? The guy that sends in his card every evenin' with a little bouquet of flowers?"

"That's him; and because it ain't a big bouquet it don't mean he's got buttons on all his pockets. When Payton hands out a present, it's to the Metropolitan Museum or some place like that. If any show girl ever got as much as a card from him before, I'd 'a' heard of it, and so would the world. He comes from pre-war stock, and I mean pre-Revolutionary War. He's related to some of the finest people in the country. He's a cousin or some-thin' to the guy that wrote 'Rip Van Winkle'; and as for his reputation, it's ninety-nine and forty-four-hundredths pure. If you've only got a professional interest in the kid, what are you stickin' a bayonet up to a guy like that for?"

"Because I got the kid into the show business, and I got to make sure that any guy she meets through that door you just come in by has to be all right. I was gettin' the low-down on this Irvin' guy, but seein' he's such a friend of yours, I can call off the dicks."

"Apple sauce! You've fallen for the kid yourself."

"Yeah?" returned Marty, and stared back at her without a muscle quivering, until she tossed her head in peevishness.

"All right! Act like a Chink on the witness stand, if you want to, but you can't fool me. I've been around too long."

"Don't let your dear public find that out," warned Marty, as he crossed behind the set and went toward his dressing room.

Once alone in the room, however, Marty sat before his table, wearing a vacant stare and pulling to pieces a stick of paint, bit by bit, bit by bit—

V

THE Traynors employed a housekeeper nowadays, but Marilyn thought of Thursday, when this functionary took a holiday, as the happiest day of the week. Then she could don her flowered apron and cook dinner for her father and brothers. Marty sat at the table on these Thursday nights, and heightened the picnic touch with his dry witticisms. This evening, however, he appeared unusually silent, and when he did bid for a laugh he failed.

His silent mood persisted in the taxi that bore Marilyn and himself toward the theater; but as the vehicle rolled across Manhattan Bridge, and the jeweled city lay before them with its myriad lights twinkling like the stars in some new firmament, Marty turned to the girl.

"Marilyn, I'm goin' to have you meet some one to-night after the show—a man named Payton Irvin'."

"Is that the one who sends flowers and just his personal card?"

"Yeah. He's the real thing—I made certain of that. He's worth millions, kid. Some was left to him, but most of it he made himself, and he ain't much older than I am. He's society, too—the real thing. Know what I mean? The kind they name telephone exchanges after. I'll bring him to your room after the show."

"All right, Marty," said Marilyn in a vague tone from the corner of the cab. "All right, if you say so."

Silence, save for the singing of the tires, enveloped them again.

Marty introduced Irving to Marilyn after the show, in her dressing room. His pleasant manner placed Marty and Marilyn at ease. He was not over thirty, and did not look older, but he gave an impression of maturity beyond his years. He had jet-black hair, but his eyes were blue, very clear and steady. A firm, yet kind mouth and a figure of military trimness gave him an air of authority. You felt at once that he scarcely knew the meaning of failure, and that he attained his ends, not by aggressive force, but by the natural dominance of an efficient personality.

He invited Marty and Marilyn to go out with him, and an invitation from him carried the weight of an imperative. Marty accompanied them on several successive nights, always to some quiet hotel or restaurant—and then Irving and Marilyn began going out together.

Back stage buzzed with comment, as Marty well knew. He felt Grace Taylor's searching eyes upon him, like the green optics of a cat, waiting for him to reveal by look or sign his real state of mind over the growing intimacy of Irving and Marilyn. One night he heard—because he was meant to hear—Grace speak to Eddie Hanlon, principal comedian in the show.

"Eddie, if you own any stock in jewelry or florist concerns, sell out now. With Irvin' havin' the pole, there's goin' to be an awful slump on the stuff that goes to Room 8!"

Grace spoke prophetically. Without Marilyn's appeal over the footlights diminishing in the slightest, and without a hint of romance creeping into print, her other admirers seemed intuitively to sense the hopelessness of competition.

A little later it was whispered among the members of "Flying High" that the engagement was to be announced officially at an after-theater supper given by Irving's mother, to which, at Marilyn's request, the whole company had been invited.

On the appointed evening Payton Irving came into Marty's dressing room. He and Marilyn were to leave before the end of the performance, as soon as she could change after her final number.

"This may be the last time that I shall see you here, Mr. O'Hare," he told Marty in his precise and considerate manner. "I wish to tell you how grateful I am for your friendly attitude."

"Thank you," answered Marty. He barely checked himself from adding "sir" involuntarily. Irving studied him, fared no better in reading him than had Grace Taylor.

"Of course," Irving went on, "after the announcement of the engagement Marilyn will sever her connection with the stage. I would like to have it managed as quietly as possible."

"Yes, I can fix it," said Marty. "I've been sort o' breakin' in another girl. She's got the steps down."

Why tell Payton Irving that Marilyn's end was his end too? As a dancing team they were a unity, and he could no more find a substitute for her than for one of the Siamese twins.

Irving moved to the door and turned back.

"And then about to-night—you see my angle?"

"Sure! I was ahead of you. I knew that plan was out from the start."

Irving again studied the dancer. Perhaps he saw features a trifle too serious for the care-free Marty, but on the whole it was the same happy-go-lucky

fellow with the same improvident curl to his mouth.

"I want you to feel assured," declared Irving finally, "that I will do everything possible to make Marilyn happy."

"Sure! I'm playin' you on the nose. Most of my partners knocked off some-thin' good in the marriage lottery, but the kid's the cream of the bunch, and she deserves the best. You're good, but even you ain't too good for her. No-body could be that."

Marty held the door open for Payton Irving and closed it behind the visitor. Then he stood there slowly turning the knob, turning the knob—

And now Marty waited in the wings for Marilyn. This would be their last dance of the night—their last dance of any night.

Marilyn came quietly to her partner's side. Her warm little hand trembled in his, just as it had on that first night in her own home, in the little apartment over in Brooklyn, where she wore a flowered apron and cooked big steaks and heaps of mashed potatoes, and where Eddie teased her and called her "Redhead."

Marilyn looked up and smiled, frightened and trusting. The orchestra out front, with the famous Mal Nelson directing, broke into the vamp of the dance number—their last dance.

"Laugh, clown, laugh!" cried Marty with a strange and unexpected laugh.

Marilyn looked up at him in startled wonderment.

"What?"

"Nothin', kid. Just old Marty tryin' to pull a sagacious crevice. Come on, kid, let's go—and make 'em like it!"

To the appreciative audience they were the same beautifully matched pair

giving themselves wholly to the dance—Marilyn palpably nervous, but happy and trusting; Marty so understanding, so considerate and capable.

The dance ended. Marilyn took her bow with that same look of confusion and modest deference to her partner. She and Marty came to the footlights again and again in response to the applause. Then the house darkened, and Marilyn melted into the back stage shadows. Marty would not see her again that night.

Nevertheless, he did see her. He came back stage when he felt sure that she had gone; but the stage door opened and she returned. Her wrap was pulled tightly about her slender form, her eyes were filled with hurt.

"Marty, Payton says you're not coming—that none of you are coming."

"No, kid." He put his hand on her arm and turned her toward the door again. "We didn't want to tell you before. We couldn't work it your way. His crowd and this gang—well, we wouldn't mix. Everybody would be on edge, and the whole party would be a bust. You wouldn't want your engagement party to be a bust, would you? But we'll be there in spirit, kid. We're throwin' a party of our own for you right here on the stage after the show. Everybody's in on it, and there's goin' to be big eats, the orchestra, and everything. There's goin' to be a chair at the head of the table, just as if you was really here, kid. Now run along to *your* little party, and just remember the gang is wishin' you luck right here."

He ushered her out by the stage door, where Payton took charge of her. Marty came back—and found Grace Taylor watching him. He brushed his hands.

"Well, that's that!" he remarked, and stared mockingly at Grace as he walked by.

VI

A **HEAVY** curtain separated the darkened house from the stage. The last set had been struck and parked against the walls. Surrounded by the gray backs of the flat pieces, the "Flying High" company celebrated.

All the essentials for a good time were on hand in abundance—food furnished by one of the most widely known caterers, liquid refreshment furnished by some one not so widely known, and of course a plethora of talent and fun-making ability. In spite of all this, the party fell flat. The empty chair at Marty's right, instead of serving as an inspiration, acted as a damper.

Food was passed, and Marty drank. Members sang and danced, and Marty drank. The orchestra played, and Marty drank.

Grace Taylor leaned over to Marty.

"Lay off, Marty! You're not used to lappin' it up this way.

"Thish ish another night, Grace, ol' dear!"

"Cut it, Marty! Once your kind start this way, the parachute never opens."

"Pa'chute?"

"Marty, don't ruin your life because of one girl."

He opened his mouth to protest vigorously, and then caught himself. Laughing, he pointed a finger at her.

"H-m! Tried to shoot a fasht one over, huh? Thought you'd catch me nappin' off firsh! Thought I'd fall on your shoulder and tell you I was crazy about the kid, didn't you?" He rose uncertainly to his feet. "Not me! I never fell for a hooper in—"

He became conscious of a stir in the gathering. He followed the stares of those seated around the table. He saw that the stage door had opened, and framed against the night stood Marilyn. Her evening cape had fallen back, its black wings folded. He saw the myriad tiny lights reflected from the brilliant-studded white frock and the rhinestone band in the copper-gold hair.

He brushed his hands across his eyes and looked again, fearfully, as if she might have vanished like some unsubstantial dream; but she was still there.

"How—how did you get here?" he gasped.

She took a step forward.

"Oh, Marty, I didn't belong! Payton's people are so different! They tried to be nice; but I was choking, smothered—like a bird in a cage, a golden cage. I wanted to be here!" She came nearer to him, holding her eyes upon him as if he and she were the only two present. "Can't I come back—to you?"

"Can't—can't—" A lump formed in his throat, and he attempted to swallow it. "Hey, Mal!" he gasped, to the orchestra leader. "Give us our number, quick!"

A word and a wave from the leader, and the orchestra broke the tension. Marty grabbed Marilyn, wrap and all.

"Come on, kid! Our cue!"

His knees felt like flannel, and he bumped a chair or two before he straightened out, but he held Marilyn tightly—tighter than ever before. Her face was right under his. He bent down and kissed her.

"The first one, kid—the first of a zillion!"

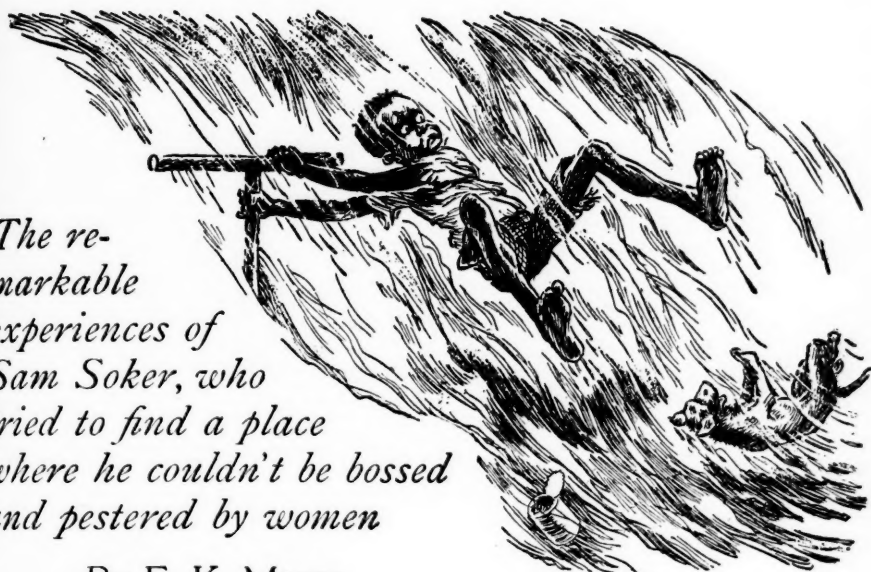
Grace Taylor thrust out her glass for Eddie Hanlon to fill.

"Now we can throw a *real* party!" she exclaimed.

A Tickfall Hero

The remarkable experiences of Sam Soker, who tried to find a place where he couldn't be bossed and pestered by women

By E. K. Means



THREE men of the Big Four were waiting in the Henscratch hang-out for the arrival of Pap Curtain. That member of the Tickfall quartet was seldom late, and the three others were impatient for his coming, feeling sure that he would bring them the news of some interesting local event which had delayed him.

"I figger Pap is conversin' wid dem white men about dat fishin' trip," Skeeter Butts remarked. "Dey's wishin' to take all fo' of us Big Fo' wid 'em to wait on 'em."

"I ain't cravin' so hard to go down to dat old mill dam," Vinegar Atts said. "De Tickfall River down dar is

full of quicksand. Eve'y now an' so often a feller walks along dem banks an' steps on whut looks like solid ground, an' he sinks down out of sight to hellangone an' jines de lonesome squad in de silent halls of death."

"Dey tell me de quicksand is cuttin' in under dat old dam, an' de dam is li'ble to bust out any minute," Figger Bush announced. "I don't want to be ar'oun' when she turns loose!"

"Dis here quicksand don't look good to me," Vinegar Atts said thoughtfully. "Now you listen to dis—I cornducted a fun'ral once down whar we is fixin' to go fishin', an' dey dug de grave fer dat corp' widout knowin' dat dey wus in de quicksand. Dey put de coffin down in de hole an'

throwed de dirt in on it, an' dat grave wus deeper atter dey put in all deir dirt dan it wus when dey dug it in de fust place. Dey hauled two wagon loads of sand an' poured it in, an' by dat time de grave wus fifteen foot deep. You had to stand on de edge of de hole an' look down to see de bottom, like you wus lookin' down a well. Den dey hauled a load of straw an' filled de grave wid dat, an' us all got skeart an' went away from dar. Dat corp' didn't know whar he wus gwine, but he wus on his way!"

At that moment Pap Curtain came in. His three colleagues ceased their talk and glared at him like three irate school-teachers reproving a child who had come tardily to school.

For his part, Pap behaved exactly as such a child would probably do, attempting with an air of nonchalance to conceal the fact that he knew he was not on time. He went quietly about the usual procedure of the Big Four when assembling for the morning conference. He placed his battered wool hat on the top of the table. He opened a pocket knife, and slowly and solemnly cut a pipeful of tobacco from a plug. He laid the knife upon the table, and made a leisurely search for his pipe. Then, when he was ready to light up, he had to hunt through all his pockets for a match.

All of this leisurely performance was most exasperating to the other members of the party, but they watched it in silence.

"Well?" Skeeter Butts barked finally. "Whut made you late? Ain't you got no explanation, nor 'pology?"

"Nothin'," Pap answered indifferently. "Nothin'. I got slowed up by de janitor of de white folks' church, an' dat man is as nigh nothin' as nothin' kin ever be."

"Any man whut janits a church is a mighty pore specimen of de cullud race," Skeeter agreed. "He done got to listen all de time to all de reg'lar services, an' dat much religium ain't good fer his cornstitution. It kind of breaks down his niggerhood, as it were."

"Lawd!" Figger Bush sighed. "Think of havin' to hear all de sermons, all de prayers, all de songs, an' all de gwines-on in a whole church all de endurin' time! Dat won't do no man no good!"

"You niggers don't know nothin' about it," Vinegar Atts, the preacher, announced. "You ain't never tried it."

"Dat's right," Skeeter laughed. "Whut's mo', we ain't gwine to be spoted an' take a chance. Dat much religium would shore ruin me!"

"Dat ain't de wust of de janitorin' job," Pap Curtain remarked, as he pressed down the ashes in his pipe. "De wust is de misforchine of havin' to be in at all de pop'lar amusements of de church."

"Pop'lar amusements?" Skeeter Butts asked. "I thought churches wus opposed to 'em."

"Dey mostly is," Pap agreed; "but dey ain't opposed to de popular amusements dat dey approve, an' de chief popular amusement of eve'y congregation in eve'y church is blimblammin' de janitor an' bawlin' him out."

"Ain't dat a noble truth?" Figger Bush exclaimed. "I acted as a substitute janitor once. I got bawled out promiscuous de fust Sunday an' cussed out an' fired out de secont Sunday. Dat ended my career in sich-like pid-dlin' jobs. I ain't never been able to git a job in a church since."

"Dat's jes' whut made me late," Pap said. "I stood on de corner of

de street an' listened to a fat white lady bawlin' out Sam Soker. It was shore a show! Dat pore rabbit jes' stands dar wid his hat in his hand an' says, 'Thankee, ma'am, thankee, ma'am, thankee, ma'am!' An' dat ol' fat woman done eve'ything but cuss!"

"Whut wus de ol' lady peeved about?" Figger Bush asked.

"She ain't never said fer certain," Pap grinned. "It 'pear like her peeve had run through a long time, an' she wus jes' relievin' her mind of all her complaints. She begun wid de fires of las' winter, dat wus either too warm or wasn't hot enough, an' she ended wid de ice water of las' Sunday, dat didn't hab no ice in it."

"It's jes' de same ol' toon," Figger Bush said. "Dey sings it all de time. Den de lady folks goes prancin' home an' says, 'I gib dat janitor a piece of my mind!'"

"A feller is a mighty pore nigger dat cornsents to be wooled around by a lot of women folks," Pap asserted. "I been married five times, an' dem five wives is done tuck all de starch out'n my system. I's jes' a downtrod nothin' of a nigger; but I makes it a rule to listen to whut's said, an' den I hits de path an' goes away."

"Hursh!" Vinegar Atts whispered. "Here comes Soker now!"

II

A SMALL, timid, rabbit-faced negro came across the floor toward them and with an apologetic smile sat down upon the edge of a chair, as if poised for immediate flight if any one gave him an unkind word. He apparently expected no other kind but the unkind.

The four men looked at him silently, waiting for him to speak first, but his training as the sexton of a white folks' church had accustomed him to

be silent until he was spoken to; and so he waited for them to tell him to begin.

"You hab our permission to speak, Soker," Skeeter said in a tone of infinite pity, noting with sorrow how Sam had degenerated into a creature of fear and inferiority. "Tell us anything you got on yo' mind."

"I jes' come aroun' to git a few views from you," Soker began uncertainly. "Pap stood by an' listened while a white lady bawled me out, an' I had to stand still an' take it, but I didn't enjoy it none. I come to git a couple of views from you about whut should be did."

"You don't hab to wuck at dat job, does you?" Vinegar asked.

"It pays me pretty good, an' it ain't so awful hard," Soker answered. "Of co'se de hours come bad, but I done got use to dat. I ain't got no complaint excep' dat I got to be wooled aroun' by all de women folks whut belong to dat church. Dey all feel like dat church belongs to 'em jes' like deir own homes, an' dat dey kin boss how it ought to be swept an' cleaned an' tended to."

"You cain't gib no back talk to a white lady," Skeeter announced. "Whut you oughter do is to quit."

"Dat wouldn't git me no relief," Soker said miserably. "You see, I got three women at my cabin."

"Good Lawd!" Vinegar exclaimed. "You mean you scandalizes dis community by bein' married to three women?"

"Garsh, naw!" Soker exclaimed with the utmost contempt. "I wouldn't marry no woman for a millyum dollars, unless she wus deaf an' dumb an' blind; but I got to live wid dem three. One of 'em is my maw, an' de yuther two is my sisters, an' I don't seem to

be able to git away from any of them nohow."

"I wouldn't let no nigger woman dat lived in my cabin peck on me," Skeeter Butts, the unmarried man of the quartet, announced. Knowing nothing about the matter made him bold in this expression of opinion. "Why don't you show yo'se'f a man, an' tell dem nigger womans whut you think about 'em?"

"Mebbe dat would be tol'able safe," Vinegar said cautiously. "You see, ef a feller talks back to his women folks instead of takin' eve'ything off'n 'em, dey won't be so apt to start somepin when dey know it 'll lead to somepin else."

"When dey talk as much as you is willin' to stand, tell 'em to shut up, and den take you hat an' git up an' git," Pap Curtain snarled. "I been married five times, an' I knows!"

"Whut happens nex'?" Soker asked.

"I don't know," Pap grinned. "I don't stay to see."

"Of co'se every feller whut wucks fer de white people is got to take a certain amount of talk off'n 'em," Vinegar Atts declared. "He kin avoid a good deal of it by dodgin' aroun' when he sees 'em comin', or not hearin' 'em when dey call, an' sich like; but ef a man has to make a livin' by takin' talk off'n white women, dar ain't no reason why de black women in his house should continue de bizness when he comes home to rest. It seems to me dat dey might be pussuaded to see it dat way."

"You kin gib 'em plenty of back talk," Skeeter announced positively. "Anyway, de only advice I hab fer you now is to go home an' try it, an' den come back an' repote."

"It sounds dangerous to me," Soker

said uneasily; "but I'll make de rifle. I'll try it once, anyhow!"

III

Two days after this, as the four men sat upon the rear steps of the courthouse, Little Bit came running up to them.

"Dar's a cullud man down at de Henscratch," he told them, "who say he wants to see you right away."

"Whut mought his name be?" Vinegar asked. "Mebbe he wants to make a little borry of money."

"Sam Soker is whut he calls hisse'f," Little Bit giggled. "He don't want no money, but he looks like he needs he'p."

"Whut ails him?" Skeeter Butts inquired.

"He's all beat up," Little Bit snickered. "Somebody soaked Soker. He looks like about fo'teen things done bust aroun' him all at de same time."

"Soker has come back to repote," Pap Curtain grinned.

"I know whut happened to dat coon," Skeeter Butts said. "He tried a lot of back talk on his nigger women at home, an' got away wid it. Den he tried a lot of back talk to de white women at de church, an' got beat up."

When they arrived at the Henscratch, they found Soker lying upon a pool table. His head was cut in several places, his face was bruised and swollen, the blood was oozing through his torn clothes, and he seemed to be badly scared and thoroughly miserable.

"Whut come to pass, Soker?" Skeeter asked.

"I talked back to dem women in my cabin, an' dey beat me up," Soker replied sadly. "Dey's all bigger an' stronger dan me, an' I didn't hab no chance."

"Leave 'em!" Skeeter snapped.

"Don't stay wid 'em another minute!"

"I done left 'em fer good," Soker said. "Dey'll never see me agin."

"Dat's de way to talk," Pap applauded. "Whut about yo' job?"

"I done resigned," Soker said. "I done heard de las' talk from a woman dat I aims to listen to."

"Whut you gwine to do now?" Vinegar inquired.

"I hope you niggers kin tell me whar I kin git a job whar dar ain't no women aroun'," Soker replied. "Eve'y place I ever been, I done saw women, but dar shore mus' be some place whar women ain't aroun' to pester an' boss a man. I's huntin' dat place from dis time on."

"Whut kind of wuck kin you do?" Skeeter asked.

"I kin janitor, farm, garden, white-warsh, odd jobs, an' cook," Soker told them. "I ain't very good at any of dem things, but I kin manage to git by an' draw my wages till dey kin find somebody else."

"You better join de army," Pap Curtain snarled. "Dat ain't full up wid women yit, in spite of de fack dat dey loves a scrap. All dem yuther jobs you mention has a woman boss, an' you cain't never do to suit 'em."

"I got de job fer him," Skeeter laughed. "Down on de Tickfall River dar's a bunch of white men whut's fishin' fer mussel shells. Dey's gatherin' up a whole barge load of shells to float 'em down de river to a button factory. Dey make pearl buttons out'n dem shells. I know dem white men would be proud to git a good cullud cook."

"It's a awful smelly place," objected Pap.

"I don't object to dat," Soker assured them.

"No women aroun'," Skeeter said.

"Dat suits me fine!" Soker declared, as he rose from the table and scrambled painfully to the floor. "I's gwine to hunt dat place. Ef you see any woman huntin' fer me, tell her I's gone fer good an' never expeck to come back alive."

He passed out of the building. The time came when the Big Four interpreted his last remark as strangely prophetic.

IV

A few days after this the Big Four accompanied a party of white men down the Tickfall River for a fishing trip. There was an old mill dam across the river at the point where they had come to camp, and just as they stepped out of their automobiles the dam broke.

For months, perhaps for years, the water had been undermining the masonry. The whole river bed was treacherous, because of the quicksand, and they all happened to be at the exact spot at the right moment to witness a thrilling sight.

A great wave, like a billow of the ocean or the back wash of a giant steamboat, came rolling landward. A negro boy, with a dog beside him, was fishing upon a part of the masonry near the lock, the only portion of the dam which did not crumble and submerge. As the wave came rolling toward the spot where the little lad stood, an advancing wall of water twenty feet high, the youth exhausted all the vocalizations of the human throat to express his fear of being washed to the Gulf of Mexico. His wails of terror could be heard above all the roar of the catastrophe.

The dreadful emergency gave the terrified boy what was perhaps the only original idea he had ever formu-

lated. He seized the iron screw key that opened and closed the lock gates, clasped both hands around it, and, shutting his mouth and eyes, awaited the flood. In a few seconds the wave of water swept over him, leaving him drenched and scared, but safe.

The wash swept away the boy's dog. The animal could swim, and rode the waves, but he used what proved to be poor judgment in selecting a place to land. As he tried to get out upon the bank, about half an acre of land caved into the river and fell, so to speak, right into his face. The cave-in started another wash, which swept a second time over the screaming boy, who now thought that the end of the world had come, and that everything was crumbling and settling down to ultimate finality. The dog thought so, too.

The wave swept the dog entirely across the river, and he tried to get out on the opposite side, when an immense tree that stood near the bank was loosened from its moorings, came crashing down into the stream, and also fell right into the canine's face. That started another wave toward the howling boy, but the billow died in mid stream, overcome by the rushing, plunging torrent released from restraint by the broken masonry.

The men hastened to rescue the frantic boy from his precarious position. Vinegar Atts stood on the bank and bawled admonitions to the befuddled dog until he managed to get to shore. Then the boy and the dog held what Vinegar described as a "prayer an' praise service" in gratitude for their deliverance from a watery grave.

As soon as the boy was in possession of his faculties and could speak coherently, he asked:

"I wonder whut done happened to dem men whut wus gatherin' mussel

shells down de river! I bet dat water done washed 'em out complete!"

"Lawd hab mussy!" Vinegar Atts exclaimed. "Dar wus a Tickfall nigger in dat gang of wuckers. His name wus Soker, an' he used to be janitor fer Dr. Sentelle's white folks' church. Us Big Fo' got him a job wuckin' down de river, an' now he's dead, an' we coons is responsible fer his suddent an' violent deceast!"

With great excitement the white men and the negroes hurried down the river to the spot where the boy said the mussel hunters had been working. They searched for several hours, following the course of the river for a number of miles, but they found no trace of the unfortunate victims. Then they went back home, wondering at the fate of the lost men, and carried the news of the disaster to Tickfall.

The next afternoon Vinegar Atts came in and sat down with his friends. His face was a picture of consternation and sadness, and the other men were so much impressed with Vinegar's solemnity that they feared to ask him what ailed him. At last Vinegar sighed deeply and said:

"I jes' heard dat Soker is comin' back to Tickfall."

"Whut's bringin' him back to us?" Skeeter asked.

"A hearse," Vinegar replied.

"Oh, my Lawd!" Skeeter wailed. "So de water really did git him! An' now he's comin' home in a hearse!"

"His last words to us wus dat he wus gone fer good an' never expeck to come back alive," Figger quacked.

"Is de white folks dat wus workin' wid Soker comin' home in de same hearse?" Pap Curtain asked.

"Naw, suh. De white folks is ridin' home in autos," Vinegar told them. "Only Soker is comin' back in de

hearse. Dey tell me dat Soker saved all seven of de white men an' rescued 'em out of de water when de dam bust."

"I reckon de white folks is bringin' him in," Vinegar surmised. "I figger dey's gwine to gib him a big fun'ral at de white church whar he wucked as janitor, an' den dey'll turn him over to us to funeralize him some mo'. I guess it will be de biggest nigger fun'ral ever helt in dis town!"

For a long time the four men sat together in silence. They could visualize the funeral service that would be held in the white folks' church, with Dr. Sentelle speaking words of eloquent eulogy and proclaiming the achievements of a humble and simple man who had done his duty in a time of danger and "had counted his life not dear unto himself." They could also see in their mind's eye the service in the Shoofly Church over the body of their greatest hero.

"It's queer how luck hits a nigger," Pap Curtain remarked thoughtfully. "Sam Soker warn't nothin' but a little skeart rabbit of a man, who got mad when a passel of white women bossed him, an' who let a bunch of black women beat him up an' run him away from home. Dar never wus a time when you couldn't put a lightnin' bug on de end of a corncob an' run dat coon to death. He wus jes' nachelly bawn skeart an' skittish; an' now he comes back to us wid de rep of bein' de bravest nigger dat ever lived in dis town!"

"Us ought to git a little of dat glory," Skeeter Butts announced. "Ef it hadn't been fer us, dat Soker nigger never would hab been heard of excep' as de downtrod janitor of a church. We told him whut to do to git away. We told him whar to go, and we gib him his chance. We made him a hero!"

"Shore!" Vinegar Atts agreed. "De Big Fo' of Tickfall gits mo' ex-putt in its advice eve'y year. De inventor of a machine is bigger an' greater dan any machine he makes, an' we is hero makers! Three loud cheers!"

"Here dey comes!" exclaimed Figger Bush, looking through the window at a cloud of dust upon the highway.

The four men walked out in front of the Henscratch and stood waiting with bared heads while an auto hearse, followed by two automobiles, approached. To their immense surprise, the hearse turned aside as it drew near them. The two automobiles passed on, but the hearse came to a stop where they were standing.

"My good gawsh!" Vinegar Atts screamed, and almost fell dead with astonishment, while the three other men reeled back against the wall of the building in speechless amazement; for the driver of the auto hearse was the late lamented Soker!

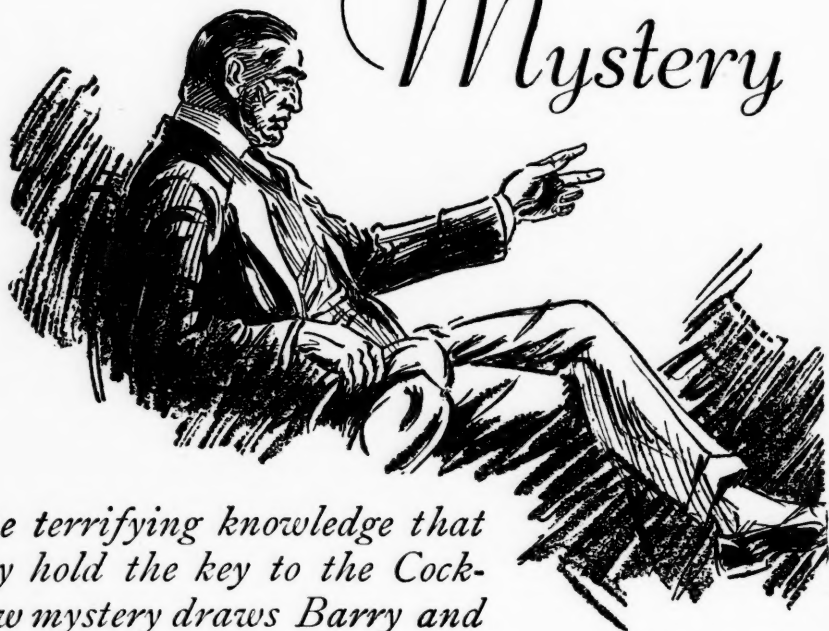
Soker sat there and grinned at them with the air of a man who was quite satisfied with himself. It was apparent that he knew nothing of his reputation as a hero.

"Dat ol' mill dam went bust, bruders," he said. "It warshed all our mussel shells to hellelujah. Ef all us wuckers hadn't took a mawnin' off an' went squorl huntin', we mought hab got drowned by dat water."

"Jes' so," Vinegar said, feebly fanning at himself with his stovepipe hat.

"But now I done got me a new job as hearse driver fer a undertaker," Soker announced. "You never saw no women folks messin' aroun' an' meddlin' wid a hearse driver. I had one woman to ride wid me dis mawnin', but she laid real still in a long black box, an' never said a word!"

The Night Club Mystery



The terrifying knowledge that they hold the key to the Cockcrow mystery draws Barry and Janet closer together

"Now, Miss Perry, you was at the Cockcrow last night, wasn't you?"

By Elizabeth Jordan

Author of "Miss Nobody from Nowhere," etc

WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT

FATE stalked into the sleepy little Massachusetts town of Wheaton and laid a line which was to extend to New York's underworld fourteen years later. This is how it happened:

Barry Cabot, an orphan, was reared by his aunt, Marcia Cabot. He had been given a fishing rod on his ninth birthday, and was very unhappy be-

cause Aunt Marcia would not let him go alone to Swift River, which was too deep for a small child. And there was no one available to go with Barry, so he lingered around the front gate disconsolately.

A stranger, J. C. Bleecker of New York, visiting Wheaton on business, agreed to take the boy fishing. The two set out on an all-day excursion, with lunch. Bleecker was so companionable and understanding that he won

his way into Barry's heart. The lad idolized him for many years afterward, even though, unknown to Barry, fourteen years were to elapse before their next meeting.

Living next door to the Cabots were Mrs. Anne Perry and her niece, Janet, three years younger than Barry, her

upon a musical career, and young Cabot traveling abroad and later obtaining a position in a New York bank.

Their correspondence had died out. The two had not met for three years, when accidentally Barry discovered



playmate. Janet's mother was dead. All that the child knew of her father was that he was an engineer in South America, whom she had never seen, but who kept her generously supplied with money.

When they grew up, Barry went to Harvard, while the girl attended a fashionable finishing school. At the time of Aunt Marcia's death, when Barry was twenty, Janet proved to be a ministering angel, and the first flash of mature sympathy passed between her and Barry.

They were separated soon afterward, however, Janet moving to New York with her aunt, and embarking

Janet living in the same apartment house with him. She was taking singing lessons, and frequently giving "whoopie" parties in her apartment.

Barry, conservative and methodical, disapproved of this, and set about reforming her. He dropped in on one of the gay parties, to learn just what she was doing, and took her whole "gang" to the Cockcrow Night Club for an evening's revelry.

Meanwhile, J. C. Bleecker had become a depositor at Barry's bank, and it was inevitable they, too, should come together again. Bleecker, now known as Brian Strong, was as likable as ever, but Howson, a bank official, warned Barry that he was a gambler, and was running with notorious underworld characters.

Indeed, the night Barry went to the

Cockcrow he learned that Strong was there also, and was playing for heavy stakes in a little room, from which, as the night advanced, emanated sounds of quarreling and then two revolver shots.

A wounded man staggered out of that room, paused in front of the table where Barry was sitting with Janet, and made his way through a narrow corridor, followed by a gunman of catlike movements. Janet saw the first man, but not the second. Then the lights went out.

CHAPTER XI

THE GET-AWAY



ARRY caught Janet's arm and by sheer force dragged her to her feet and around the table into the corridor. The next instant he was running after the injured man, pulling her with him.

"We've got to follow him. He's making for the rear exit," he whispered. "Quickest way. We can get out there, too."

They reached the exit as he spoke, and, pushing past a swinging door, found themselves in a side alley. Just ahead of them something had crumpled up against a wall. Beside them a shadow seemed to flicker and pause near that huddled thing.

The shrill summons of a policeman's whistle, almost immediately echoed by another, filled their ears.

They dodged into a back hallway, and thus escaped two officers coming on the run, whistling as they came. Both policemen stopped beside the fallen figure. One remained there and the other ran on.

Barry pulled his companion out of the hallway into the alley and rushed

her to the nearest street and along it, keeping close to the buildings.

Half a block away the dimming lights of Sixth Avenue smiled at them like tired but friendly eyes. The entire episode could not have taken more than a minute or two.

They reached the avenue, and caught the roving eye of the driver of the only taxicab in sight. The cab stopped at Barry's signal. He lifted his companion into it. She seemed almost unconscious.

He had realized that some one was close behind them—so close that he could hear the sound of breathing. Now, before he could close the door after dropping into the rear seat beside Janet, he felt something lurch against him as the follower sprang into the taxicab.

Even as his foot touched the floor the newcomer slammed the door shut, reached for one of the folded front seats, pulled it out and sat down.

"Step on it!" he ordered.

The taxicab started with a jerk that nearly jolted them out of their places.

"Here, you—" Barry began hotly.

"Keep yer shirt on!"

The third passenger turned his head and spoke again to the driver.

"Forty-Secon' Street an' Van'er-bilt," he barked, adding slowly, and with concentrated meaning. "*I git off dere. See?*"

The driver saw, and stepped harder. The cab skidded and rocked as it whirled around the first corner.

Barry had taken time to think. The man was no officer, no pursuer. He was another refugee from the Cockcrow, as anxious as themselves to get away from its neighborhood. He had made his purpose clear. There was nothing to be gained by trying to eject him from the cab.

He was a big fellow—young, probably in his early thirties—dark skinned and smooth faced. His eyes were black, with yellow lights in them. The white front of his dress shirt gleamed under his unbuttoned overcoat. The coat collar, turned in on one side, testified to the haste with which he had flung on the garment, as did the twisted folds of a shoulder. A soft hat was pulled down to his heavy black eyebrows.

He paid no attention to his fellow passengers, but sat crouched forward in his uncomfortable seat, staring through the open side window.

Notwithstanding his motionless position, there was something extraordinarily tense in his attitude. Barry kept an unwinking gaze on him. This was the man who for one instant had stood behind that reeling victim in the corridor. Young Cabot was now sure of it.

The cab stopped at Forty-Second Street and Vanderbilt Avenue. The stranger opened the door, got out, and handed a dollar to the driver with what seemed perfectly coördinated movements. The next instant he had turned and was walking rapidly away.

Barry eyed him, expecting, without quite knowing why, that the man would enter the Grand Central Station. Instead, he descended into the subway.

"Where do we go from here, boss?" The driver asked the question with a care-free grin.

"Nowhere. We're getting out."

Barry helped Janet to the sidewalk. She was still dazed and speechless. He gave the driver another dollar and watched the vehicle roll away.

When he could no longer hear the bronchial wheeze of its motor he signaled to a second driver—there were

plenty of them around the station—and, putting Janet into the new cab, gave their address to the man at the wheel.

Janet had not yet spoken. For a moment, in the first cab, he was sure that she had fainted.

"Night clubs offer one some odd companions," he remarked.

He felt her shiver violently against his shoulder.

"It was awful to see that wounded man, but it was worse to have that horrible creature in the cab with us," she said in a tone so low that he had to bend his head to catch the words. "He sat there like a big black cat ready to spring—and did you see his eyes? They shone in the dark, exactly like a cat's!"

"There was something mighty unpleasant about him," Barry admitted, "and his manners were atrocious. But I suppose he was merely going while the going was good—as we were."

She had nothing to say to this. Again the silence held them. At the entrance of the house behind the iron grille he produced his latchkey, unlocked the front door, led her across the threshold and helped her upstairs to the door of her flat.

"All right now," he assured her. "I'm awfully sorry you had such an experience, but it's over. Take a dose of bromide, if you have some, and go to bed. Don't admit to any one that you were in that club to-night. I think your friends will keep their mouths shut, too. We don't want to be called as witnesses in a murder case, and that's what it was."

Janet was still shivering.

"What about the gang?" she asked with trembling lips. "Should we have left them?"

"We should," he retorted with em-

phasis. "Don't worry about them. They're safe at home by this time. They know all the tricks and exits of every club in town. But if they were all caught and convicted of murder and electrocuted, it would be a damned good thing for the community. Good night," he added more quietly, already ashamed of his outburst.

Janet did not reply. She gave him a look that said in effect: "So that's what you really think of us!" as she produced her latchkey with fingers that still trembled.

He unlocked the door, pushed it open, and gave the key back to her. She took it in silence, and still in silence, crossed the threshold. He heard the door shut and its bolt shoot home while he lingered to be sure that she was safe.

CHAPTER XII

JANET'S DECISION



HE story of Dan Skelly's murder at the Cockcrow Club was told the next morning, under arresting headlines, on the front page of every newspaper in New York. Columns of details were carried over to inside pages.

There were two reasons for this unusual publicity given to the death of a gambler whose passing could not be regarded by any dispassionate reader as a loss to the community.

Dan Skelly had been one of the best known and most picturesque characters in the big city's underworld, and he had been murdered in the very center of its night life.

The murderer had escaped, and no hint of his identity could be secured even from the close friends of the dead man, many of whom must have

known who killed him. Skelly himself, though he had lived for several hours after the shooting, had followed the traditions of his class and had died with lips locked on the name of his slayer.

Vociferously proclaiming these conditions, the police tacitly announced themselves "helpless"; and New York editors realized that this was to be another of those crimes of the Tenderloin district in which, in one of its conspicuous resorts, a killer slays his victim, and, in the vernacular of his world, gets away with it.

The newspapers would continue to print columns about the murder every day, and to shout for the arrest of the murderer. The police would report this clew and that clew. Rumors would fly through the air like snowflakes in a Pittsburgh blizzard.

City officials would solemnly give notice that the killer must be found. The killer would not be found. The jaw line of every managing editor in New York became more sharply defined. Every leading editorial writer reached for his pen. There had been far too much of this sort of thing. If only for the sake of the city's good name the murderer of Dan Skelly must be found.

Aside from the outstanding facts that Skelly had been shot twice in the abdomen, and had died of his wounds, authentic details of the case were amazingly few. Apparently it could not even be proved that the shooting had taken place in the Cockcrow, though Skelly had a private room there and had been found half unconscious in an alley at the rear of the club.

He was "supposed" to have been in a card game, playing for big stakes; but thus far there was no information

as to the men who had been with him. It was "rumored" that a quarrel had developed over the cards, and that Skelly had recently won the enmity of certain associates by welching over some big losses.

A policeman, whose beat was just outside the club, thought he had heard the sound of pistol shots in the building. He had summoned a near-by fellow officer and had evidently waited for the arrival of this reënforcement, for the two policemen had almost simultaneously reached the side of the dying man. Recognizing the victim, the officer on the club beat had asked, "Who bumped you off, Dan?" And the dying man had gasped, "There's a fat chance that I'll tell you!"

That was the news end of Skelly's murder as it stood.

In the matter of Skelly's career the editors were better informed and made a good story of it, giving their readers vivid accounts of a many-sided personality. Skelly's friends and enemies were equally numerous and powerful. Incidents were related of his quickness, his keenness, his unerring memory for favors or for injuries.

But over his fate hung the strange and sinister silence of the underworld. Sooner or later his friends would avenge him, but they would neither ask nor accept the help of the law: and least of all would they talk.

Barry read three leading newspapers before he started for the bank. Then, from his sitting room he called Janet on the telephone.

"All right this morning?" he cheerfully inquired when she responded.

"Well—I can't quite say that. I've had an awful night." Her voice trembled.

"Of course you have. I'm coming in to see you as soon as I leave the

bank—about half past four. In the meantime—may I make a suggestion?" he stopped to ask.

"You know you may."

"Then I'm going to advise you not to see any one else before I come. None of your friends, no one at all. Better not answer the bell or the telephone before four o'clock. Don't let Mrs. Perry do it, either. When I come we'll talk things over. Is that understood?"

"Yes, I'll do anything you say."

"Thanks awfully. I'll give the general some instructions and explain to you later."

That morning, for the first time in his experience, Barry was ten minutes late at the bank. In view of this regrettable circumstance he was not surprised to receive, after the first morning rush was over, another invitation into the private office of Ward Howson.

When he entered this setting of a budding career, Howson was standing at a window, hands in his pockets, his back to the room, staring unseeingly before him, and so lost in thought that he did not hear Barry's approach. That his preoccupation was genuine was further revealed by the fact that he had forgotten to look like Uncle Alfred. He was merely a polo player and a worried one.

"Have you seen the morning newspapers?" he asked without preface.

"Of course."

Howson strolled toward his desk, indicated with a nod a chair beside it, and dropped into his own seat with a sigh that was almost a groan.

"How'd you get away?" he asked.

"Skipped out of the rear exit, and was in a taxi two minutes after the shooting."

"You were lucky," Howson said enviously. "I had my aunt and cousin

with me, and my aunt weighs two hundred pounds. I might as well have tried to get the Flatiron Building unostentatiously out of the club. We headed straight into a policeman, and I had to give him fifty dollars and show him auntie's white transformation before he'd let us move on."

"And the worst of it is," Barry sympathetically suggested, "that, of course, you'll feel it your duty to tell Uncle Alfred all about it."

Young Howson shook his head and grinned.

"Not this time," he said. "Not when Uncle Alfred's wife and beloved child were there with me, and I took them at the old girl's special request. She's muzzled me, all right. If there's any explanation to make to Uncle Alfred, she'll make it."

The reflection cheered him for a moment, but he drooped again.

"Just the same," he muttered, "I wish to the Lord she'd chosen some other night for that bat. There's going to be a lot of fine-combing in this case, and I'm afraid we'll be caught in it. By the way, did you see anything? I noticed your table was right near Skelly's room."

"You notice everything," Barry said admiringly. "I heard the shots, of course, and saw a lot of men jump up at different tables. After that I was too busy getting out to see anything but the lights of Sixth Avenue."

"Did you save the pippin I saw you supporting on the dancing floor?"

"No. I took the young lady I went with—the hostess of the party."

"Whose name," Howson murmured reflectively, "is Janet Perry. She's a stunning looking girl, but already quite a familiar figure in our gay circles. When I asked who she was, all the men within hearing answered like a Greek

chorus. She seems," he added sedately, "to be well known."

"See here, Howson, I'm going to tell you something." Barry drew his chair a little closer to his friend. "Janet Perry is one of the straightest girls I know. Don't grin—she really is. She comes from my home town—Wheaton, Massachusetts. She lived next door, and we've played together since we left our perambulators. When she came to New York I lost sight of her, till I discovered last spring that she and her aunt were living in my own apartment house. Since then I've seen her often, but we've always gone out alone till last night. I knew she was hitting it up a bit, but I had no idea what a poisonous gang she had picked to train with. And now I confess that I'm awfully worried about her."

"Are you in love with her?" Howson's expression had changed. He seemed impressed by this confidential outburst from his reserved friend, and he asked the question so simply that Barry answered it in the same way.

"No, I don't think I am. I think it's simply old friendship stuff—affection and habit. I'm awfully fond of the girl, and awfully sorry for her. She's practically alone in the world—and she's never had a fair break. I feel responsible, too. I ought to have looked her up long ago."

Howson leaned back in his swivel chair and fixed his eyes on the opposite wall. "I wonder if you realize that she's in love with you."

"Nonsense!" Barry spoke almost violently.

"No nonsense about it. I'm giving this to you straight. I watched her last night. When a man's with a family party," Howson interrupted himself to elucidate, "he's got to find his

interest and amusement outside of it. So, when I wasn't dutifully amusing Aunt Helen or my Cousin Nancy, I occasionally glanced at your table. I got an eyeful." He added impressively: "The girl's in love with you. Probably she has been in love with you all her life."

Barry groaned.

"For God's sake, don't talk that way, Howson. You're absolutely wrong." He set his teeth. "But she's running with a rotten crowd," he went on more quietly, "and, as I said, I'm frightfully worried about her."

"There's a remedy."

Getting his mind off his own troubles and on to those of another man had a revivifying effect on the branch manager. His manner grew optimistic and paternal.

"If you don't like her gang, get her out of it. She'll listen to anything you say," he predicted. He glanced at his watch and produced the dismissing nod of Uncle Alfred. "All right, Cabot, I won't keep you any longer. I just wanted to find out if you knew any more about last night's affair than I do."

Barry continued to worry about Janet Perry. He was amazed by the extent of his worry. He also worried about himself. If by any chance Janet and he were drawn into the Skelly case it wouldn't do either of them any good. There was a question in the back of his mind, too, that he resolutely suppressed there. What was it Jennie Kenshaw had said about the men who played with Skelly? Had she really mentioned—

He worried until he dropped into Janet's apartment at five o'clock that afternoon and found her alone with her aunt. Immediately thereafter he ceased to worry so much. He was in-

terested in the phenomenon, but had no time to analyze it.

As soon as he was seated, Mrs. Perry again showed the tact which had endeared her to her niece's associates, and drifted from the room.

"It's awfully good of you to come," Janet said gratefully. "But I was sure you would. I've stayed in all day, and I haven't seen a soul, though the gang has been calling and telephoning ever since eleven this morning."

"Did you get any sleep?"

Barry was shocked by her pallor and strained expression.

"Of course not." She shivered. "I didn't dare keep my eyes shut. As soon as I closed them I saw that bleeding, dying man or that horrible catlike creature in the cab with us. Barry!" Her voice rose almost hysterically. "Do you think that man—the one in the cab, I mean—had anything to do with the shooting?"

"Why should he have had?" Barry spoke with successful casualness. He was vastly relieved. She had not seen the second man. "I've no doubt he was at the club, just as we were, and that he was as anxious to get away," he went on. "But you mustn't forget there were several hundred people in that place last night, all scurrying for cover. No one wants to be drawn into a case like this. If we'd gone toward Broadway we'd have run into more of them. That's the reason I headed for Sixth Avenue."

"But we saw Skelly—we saw him standing there—"

Again her voice sharpened.

"Get your mind off that. Don't let yourself think of it at all, or of the Cat, either. There's no reason to think he had any more to do with the affair than we had."

Barry didn't know why he had

spoken of their cab companion as the Cat. Probably merely because Janet had done so, and because it seemed a fitting label for that tense, crouched, strange-eyed personality.

"What I mean is," Janet faltered, "we may be called as witnesses."

"I don't think so. No one else knows that we saw Skelly. No one else need ever know. Do you understand, Janet?"

His voice underlined the question and she looked confused.

"Do you mean that we've got to lie about it?"

"No, I don't. If we're put into the witness chair we'll tell the truth, of course. My point is that we needn't be put into the witness chair, for no one else knows we saw anything. I know you did, because I looked at you. You know I did because I'm admitting it to you. I don't intend to let any one else know it. We were the only ones who sat directly facing Skelly when he staggered out of that room. If any of the rest saw him they were too much excited to think of any one but him and themselves. They can't possibly prove that we saw him, even if they think we did. There's no reason why we should take any one else into our confidence. Besides, what could they prove by us? No one denies that Skelly's dead! You get the point, don't you, Janet?"

"Perfectly. No one will get anything from me."

"Good." He remembered another point. "Have you said anything about the affair to Mrs. Perry?"

"Not a word."

"How does she account for your being around so early this morning—and for all these newspapers? I'd get rid of them if I were you. If any of your little friends has prattled, and

some officer comes here to find out whether you know anything, so many newspapers on the floor will look suggestive."

"I'll burn them. Aunt Anne merely thinks I drank too much last night and was sick. I was, too."

Barry was sitting facing the girl, and he met her eyes in a long look while his heart dropped like lead in deep soundings. Those were such strange words to come from Janet Perry.

"It's a far cry from Wheaton and the old days, isn't it, Jan?" he asked with a sigh.

She nodded, for a moment speechless. Her lips quivered and she set them hard.

"What I can't forgive myself for," she broke out violently, "and I'll *never* forgive myself for it, is dragging you into this infernal mess! You've always kept yourself so fine and clean. And then I come along—I—I—"

"Hush. All this business has got on your nerves—and no wonder," he soothed. "But even so, my dear girl, the one thing that you ought to realize is that you *don't* have to worry about me."

She gave him a grateful look.

"You're wonderful, Barry. I believe you'd be equal to anything. It must be great to be so sure of one's self," she added wistfully.

Barry ignored the compliment.

"Let's see if there's anything new in the evening papers."

He had brought several of these with him, and he and Janet went over them together. Under their big headlines the journals offered practically nothing the morning editions had not already printed. The unconscious pathos of the rewritten stories was equaled only in the columns of the

press the next morning when once more the now stale facts, with no important additions, were rehashed for the expectant reading public.

Equally unaware of and indifferent to the anguish of editors, Janet and Barry read virtually every line about the case in every journal. Then he put both the morning and the evening copies on the blazing logs in Janet's fireplace and laid fresh fuel over their charred remains.

"How much did you spend for me last night?" Janet asked abruptly when that task was finished.

"Nothing—not a cent."

"Barry, please don't take that attitude. It was my party. I dragged you to it, and I certainly will not let you pay for it—in addition to everything else. How much was it?"

"I give you my word I don't know. I didn't keep an account, and I haven't thought of it since."

"Well, I have thought of it, and this morning I figured out about what it would be. I ought to know," she added wearily. "I've given those parties often enough to learn."

She went to her desk and came back with a handful of bank notes.

"That's my last party of the kind," she added as she offered him the notes, "and I want to pay for it myself. If you're still the friend you've always been you'll let me do it. Leave me that much self-respect, at least."

He took the money and thrust it into a pocket.

"Do you mean that?" he asked eagerly. "Do you really mean that this was the last night club party?"

"Do you really think I could ever have another, after what happened?"

He didn't answer, for he didn't know. He was amazed by the uprush of relief he experienced, but under it

lay a suspicion that she might forget that experience sooner than she thought.

"I don't think we'll be troubled by the police," he predicted confidently as they returned to their chairs before the fire. "That gang of yours has one redeeming quality, in my opinion," he went on frankly. "No one in it is looking for trouble and they've all learned to keep their mouths shut. It's about the first lesson the Tenderloin teaches its pupils, and you've only to look at the newspapers to find out how well a lot of them have learned it."

"I'm going to get rid of that gang as soon as I can," the girl replied. "Of course I can't do it overnight." She added a comment which revealed her intimate understanding of her new associates. "They'll fade away themselves as soon as they see that I'm not going to spend any more money on them."

Barry got up to go, and took both her hands.

"Good girl," he said approvingly. "If you stick to that resolution last night's experience will be worth while, no matter what develops."

CHAPTER XIII

HENNESSY BECOMES CURIOUS



AFTER dinner that evening Barry had a caller in the form of a man in civilian clothes who briefly explained that he was from "headquarters," and was an earnest seeker after truth. Barry welcomed the officer with mild surprise but entire hospitality.

Detective Hennessy softened a trifle under this tactful treatment. But he put into his breast pocket the cigar Barry offered him, and made it clear

that no time was to be lost. He was a big man with a heavy jaw and cold gray eyes.

"Mr. Cabot," he began crisply, when the two were seated. "I understand you was at the Cockcrow last night. That's straight, ain't it?"

"Yes, I was there."

"With a lady?"

"With several ladies," Barry grinned, "and a large number of gentlemen. In fact, I blew into a bunch of strangers I'd never seen before. I couldn't give you their names to save my life."

"We'll let it go at that," Hennessy agreed, and added portentously, "for the time. What I'm after, and *all* I'm after, Mr. Cabot, is to find out whether you know anything about the killing that came off there a little after three this morning."

"I heard two shots fired," Barry admitted. "I suppose every one in the place did. Then the lights went out and I hit the high spots. I must have been almost the first person out of the building."

"I guess you didn't beat Dan Skelly, at that," said Hennessy with meaning. He gave the comment time to sink in, and then continued: "Did you see Skelly or any one else near his room?"

"As I said, the lights were put out almost simultaneously with the pistol shots. I'm not very familiar with night clubs, but I suppose that's the usual procedure in such cases. Earlier in the evening I had noticed a corridor near our table, and I made for it in the darkness and found an exit into an alley. I found it because the door was at the end of the corridor, and I bumped into it. When I got outside I ran to Sixth Avenue, and was lucky enough to pick up a passing taxicab."

"And was you alone all this time?"

"I was not. I had a lady with me—the only one in the crowd I'd ever seen before. I hope, officer, you won't ask me to give you her name. It would only hurt her, and it wouldn't do you any good."

The young man spoke with disarming friendliness, but Hennessy's cold eyes did not soften.

"And what makes you so sure of that?"

Barry looked at the big detective. How much did he know?

"She was with me every second. She couldn't see any better in the dark than I could," he muttered.

"And neither of you," said Hennessy softly, "saw poor Dan Skelly standing right in front of you and trying to plug the wound with his hands. That's strange. Come, now, Mr. Cabot," he added briskly, "pour the sirup! We know you got it."

"You mean," the young man stared at him in amazement, "that Skelly was shot in the restaurant—near our table? But how could that be?" He added after a moment of seemingly stunned thought: "The shots certainly seemed near us. But the lights went out so quickly."

Hennessy looked at him and nodded.

"I see," he commented without resentment. "That's your story, and you'll stick to it. And I suppose the lady will tell the same."

"Naturally she will." Barry spoke with his first air of reserve. "She'll have to, since she doesn't see any better in the dark than I do."

He had the manner of one still courteous, but a bit fed up.

Hennessy got to his feet.

"All right. I think I'll look in next door and have a little talk with her," he announced.

"Now, I ask you, as man to man, what the devil's the sense of that?" Barry cried disgustedly. "Listen, Mr. Hennessy."

He followed his visitor to the door. "A murder was committed, and every one knows it. The victim died without telling who shot him, and every one knows that. The bunch in the room with him knows exactly who shot him, and you fellows must know who his intimates were, and you must be able to make a pretty good guess at who had a grudge against him and who bumped him off. Yet here you are following up a little bunch of casual visitors to the club, who wouldn't have known Skelly if he had come and sat at their table. And, by Jove, you seem to be hinting that he did!"

Barry became aware that he was letting his temper run away with him, and he changed his tone.

"My point is this, officer," he went on with a deprecating grin, edging past the detective till his back was against the door. "We can't help you, but you can do us a lot of harm and get nothing out of it. The young lady you spoke of belongs to a good family, and she's a fine girl. She was having a little fling, and she has already told me she's through with that sort of amusement. Naturally, to find herself in a place while a murder was being committed was a big shock to her, and she hasn't got over it. As for me, I'm in a down town bank. The fact that till last night I hadn't been in a night club for almost two years won't help me if I'm dragged into this nasty business. You get the general idea, don't you?"

Hennessy nodded again. He had listened patiently and without interruption. Now he laid a large and well-shaped hand on the young man's arm.

"Sure I get you," he said good-humoredly, and emphasized his further points with taps of a big forefinger. "But there's a whole lot about this case you don't understand, Mr. Cabot, and some of them parties at your table may know more about it than you think. You got some surprises coming to you. It's hard luck for you," he added regretfully, "that your table happened to be the only one in the club that was right in line with that hall, and mighty close to it. Dan Skelly couldn't have been much more than seven or eight feet away from you when he come out of his room into the hall; and he must of stood swingin' back and forth there for all of ten seconds before he could get up steam to make for the exit, which was the same one you and the lady used. He was crumpled up against the wall in the alley when the first police got there, and you must of gone right past him. But you didn't see him!"

"I wasn't looking around," Barry said quietly. "All I was thinking about was to get the lady and myself as far from the Cockcrow as I could, and we ran through that alley like rabbits. Besides, you must remember that there had been a lot of drinking going on. A fellow isn't his most observant self after such a night. And there was a row right at our table at the very minute of the shots."

Hennessy shook his big head.

"I know just how you feel, Mr. Cabot," he admitted, "and you're puttin' up a pretty good front, at that. But it 'd be better if you'd pull the trigger instead of stallin'. Think it over. In the meantime, I'll have a little chat with the lady."

He moved Barry aside with a firm hand and opened the door.

"May I go with you?"

Hennessy hesitated.

"I don't see any reason why you shouldn't," he decided, "if you'll keep quiet. I don't want interruptions or promptin', y' understand. The young lady and me will do the talkin'."

"All right."

Barry's mind was very busy. He had heard and read all sorts of charges against the New York police. Perhaps a couple of hundred would square this thing with Hennessy, since his own part and Jan's in the affair had been so trivial. But Hennessy did not look like the sort of man who accepts bribes, and a proffered bribe might make Hennessy think him guilty of the murder itself! In any case he'd ask the advice of some good authority before he offered one.

Hennessy had passed into the hall with steps remarkably quick and light for so large a man. He was ringing the electric bell of the Perry apartment before Barry reached his side.

"Hold on," cried the latter, "hadn't we better telephone from my room that you're coming?"

Hennessy's stern lips relaxed.

"P'raps that's the ettykit of your set, young fella, but it don't purvail in ours. It's all right, though," he added generously. "The young lady expects me."

It was clear that the young lady did. Janet herself opened the door and showed no surprise at seeing the big man. Her face brightened, however, when she recognized his companion.

"Miss Perry, this is Detective Hennessy, of police headquarters," Barry broke in before the officer could speak.

"That 'll be about all from you, my lad," Hennessy remarked severely. He led the way into the living room, from which the considerate Mrs. Perry was just retreating. All three caught the

swish of her black satin skirt as she vanished through an open door.

"My aunt," Janet explained to the officer. "She doesn't know anything about this affair," she added, "and I hope she won't have to."

In the interview that followed Barry found himself admiring both Janet and the detective. Though he looked the part, in manner Hennessy was a far cry from the detective of fiction or the stage. There was nothing hectoring or domineering about him, nor did he make any effort to be suave. He was entirely civil and very businesslike. His questions went straight to the point.

Hennessy offered the girl a chair. Barry immediately drew another forward and sat down. The detective took a seat facing them both.

"Now, Miss Perry," he began crisply, as he had done with Barry, "you was at the Cockcrow last night, wasn't you?"

"Yes, I was."

"You was giving a little party there—or was it this young gentleman's party?"

"It was my party. This gentleman was a stranger to every one in the crowd but myself. He came in at the last minute."

"Just before the killing?"

"No. I mean that he dropped into my apartment to make a call before we all left for the club, and I invited him to come with us."

"Would you mind giving me the list of your guests, Miss Perry?"

"I'd much rather not. They were there simply for amusement. They knew nothing about the crime, and, of course, they won't want their names brought in."

"I got their names, all right." Hennessy impassively produced a list. "I

just want 'em OK'd by you. I'll read them one by one, and you can check as I go."

He read the list, glancing at her after each name, and checking it as she nodded.

"Now, Miss Perry," his manner grew confidential. "I got to say what I been sayin' to Mr. Cabot here. In one way 'tis unfortunate your table was so close to that hall and to Dan Skelly's private room. You was right in line when Skelly come out into the hall. You was the only two facing that hall, with your back to the big room, an' you both must of seen him. What I want to know"—he shot the question at her like a bullet—"was any one with him or followin' him?"

Barry's heartbeats stopped. Would she fall into that simple trap? She did not.

"Why, Mr. Hennessy," she said, "the lights went right out, and it was pitch dark. Didn't Mr. Cabot tell you? It was so dark I didn't even know it was Mr. Cabot who had caught my hand and was pulling me along. I was frightened till I heard his voice. Then I let him guide me, and we ran till we reached the street."

"I know all about the lights goin' out," Hennessy wearily assured her. "Mr. Cabot has mentioned them. And I know *when* they went out," he added with emphasis. "You both had plenty of time to see Skelly and any one else that was with him or near him. What I'm askin' is, *did* you?"

Janet shuddered.

"I did not," she said positively. "If I had seen any murder I'd be having nervous prostration now. But I thought Mr. Skelly was shot in the card room."

Hennessy shook his head at her, but his air of conviction had given way to

uncertainty. With infinite relief Barry realized that the big detective was no longer so sure as he had been that these young things had seen the dying gambler swaying on his feet.

Barry was glad he had made that point about the drinking. It was natural enough that the whole crowd should be fuddled. Hennessy rose and restored the list of guests to his pocket.

"Maybe your mem'ries will improve," he suggested, but without conviction. "You'll have another chance to talk in a day or two."

He turned to Barry, whom he had ignored in the interview up till now.

"When you grabbed the lady and ran in the dark"—he ironically underlined the last three words, for the fruitlessness of this visit was getting on his nerves—"did you by any chance see a big man near you—a man as big as I am," Hennessy amplified, "but thinner, and with black eyes and a dark skin?"

"I give you my word, officer," Barry asserted positively, "that I didn't see another person near us while I was grabbing the lady and running in the dark as you put it. It was pitch dark—"

"It must of been," Hennessy interrupted impatiently. "What I mean is, Tony the Cat was at your heels, makin' his own get-away. A feather's heavy compared to Tony's footsteps, and a shadow ain't in it with him for quickness and quiet. But if you'd seen him last night I'm thinkin' you'd remember him."

Barry dared not glance at Janet.

"An' that reminds me," Hennessy added suddenly, as the others remained silent. "You sat all night facin' that hallway. Did you notice any one, before the shootin', goin' into or leavin' Skelly's room?"

"I may have seen a few waiters," Barry said with a slight annoyance. "But here's something that really ought to interest you, Hennessy. The bills for champagne and cocktails at our table last night were over three hundred dollars. How much do you think any of us saw except champagne and cocktail glasses and our dancing partners?"

Hennessy smiled.

"You're good, Mr. Cabot," he retorted admiringly. "I like to hear you talk."

"Thanks. Suppose you talk some, now. Is the man you call Tony the Cat the man the police think killed Skelly?"

Hennessy looked at him with a glint of humor in his cold eyes.

"We think a whole lot of things," he said grimly. "We think Tony Bosco and his brother Jim was both with Skelly—and we may be wrong at that. There was a dozen men in and out of the room between eleven o'clock and the murder, and if we offered a million for their names we'd not get them, for what good is a million to a dead man? But the next few days the papers will print 'rumors' that Jim Bosco and Brian Strong and Jackknife Casey and 'Ten Grand' Mantell and Tony the Cat was there, and a few others, and much good it 'll do the papers. We can't shut up men on rumors. Good night to you."

He had turned toward the door during this unexpected oration, and it was well for the listeners that he did, for he missed the swift change in Cabot's face. Barry opened the door for him and got a curt nod for his trouble.

Hennessy went down stairs, while Barry, closing the door, stood with his back to it, staring at Janet.

"Tony the Cat!" she said in a

strangled voice. "Oh, Barry!"

"Pull yourself together," he ordered. "Even if that were Tony the Cat"—he hated to put his lips to the words—"and even if he were with Skelly, there's no proof that he did the shooting. You heard Hennessy say Jim Bosco was there, too, and a half a dozen others—and Brian Strong. *Brian Strong!*"

She was struck by his repetition of the last name.

"Who's Brian Strong?" she asked, but without great interest. He could see that her thoughts were still on Tony the Cat.

Barry hesitated and dropped into a chair, for his legs were shaking. Subconsciously he had expected something like this. The ghastly irony of life called for it.

"Brian Strong?" he brought out at last. "He's a friend of mine. And I'll say," he added almost solemnly, "that the one sure thing in this beastly business is that Brian Strong did *not* kill Skelly."

CHAPTER XIV

A LAMB FOR THE SLAUGHTER



ENNESSY was well-informed about the policy of the newspapers. Their columns during the next week bore out his predictions.

For the first time since the day of the murder the case offered something new and the editors played it up with unction.

Incidentally, they played safe. The Boscos, Ed Wallis, Brian Strong, "Ten Grand" Mantell, and several others whose names were given were "said" to have played cards with Skelly at the Cockcrow the night of the murder. It was "said" there had

been trouble among the gamblers, and that charges of "welching" on his recent losses, which had been huge, had been made against Skelly.

The two Boscós alone were "said" to have won a hundred thousand dollars from Skelly in recent games, and to have vainly waited many weeks for their money. Skelly was "rumored" to have accused the Boscós of crooked playing, and to have sat in the games of the fatal night only to convince the Boscós that he had never made such charges.

The presence of the two Bosco henchmen, Jackknife Casey and the Featherbed, also "said" to have been in Skelly's room, was explained on the theory that possibly they were there to protect their bosses.

But why, the editorial writers wanted to know, should the gamblers kill their debtor? Alive he might eventually pay them. Dead he was a total loss.

Barry was not vastly interested in the Boscós, though a slight chill ran down his spine when halftone reproductions of the face of Tony the Cat stared at him from the first page of the newspapers, revealing the unforgettable features of the man who had followed Skelly into the corridor and had pushed after Barry into the taxicab.

Sick at heart, young Cabot was concentrating on what was printed about Brian Strong in the various journals. It was not much. One reporter expressed surprise at the presence of Strong in such a *galere*. Strong was supposed to be a straight player, and an habitu  of places where straight games were played. He might, the reporter thought, have been drawn in that particular night as a peacemaker and adjuster of difficulties between Skelly and the Boscós. It appeared

that Brian Strong had acted in some such capacity in squabbles among various other gamblers.

The editors centered their attention on the Boscós. The brothers, Italian born, but in America since "Big Jim" was eight and Tony three, had influence in the underworld, where they were said to head a group doing a brisk international business in the smuggling and sale of narcotics.

Barry was again a trifle late at the bank one morning, and the eloquent expression of his fellow-workers suggested that they knew why. He went through his duties almost perfunctorily.

It had been his theory, frequently expressed, that concentration on one's work could banish any personal worries; but to-day his worries got off into a mental corner and persistently considered themselves.

While Barry was looking at checks, counting out money, asking and answering questions, he was reviewing Strong's possible position as well as Janet's and his own. Both of the latter, he mentally admitted, were infernally uncomfortable. His own was serious enough to put a stop to any young banker's career.

Even Ward Howson, with Uncle Alfred back of him, was disturbed over his mere presence in the Cockcrow that night, and Ward's experience as escort to his aunt and cousin had been a gambol in a kindergarten compared to Barry's.

He felt that he needed a long talk with some man wiser and older than himself and he decided that Colonel Nicholas Jessup would be the right person. Later, he'd get in touch with Wheeler, the newspaper man who had given Ward Howson so much information.

He called up Colonel Jessup at noon and received an invitation to dine with him that evening. He liked the old fellow and at the Jessup table, at eight o'clock, he found himself slightly relaxing for the first time.

The colonel's big and lonely house was something of a mausoleum, but the food was always good and the pre-war vintages excellent. Notwithstanding the Eighteenth Amendment, Jessup dined as he had always dined, with a cocktail as a starter, a glass of sherry to go on with, a glass of champagne with his bird and a brandy liqueur with his coffee.

Ten years ago his physicians had warned him that he must cut down the eating and drinking, which were his sole weaknesses, but the colonel had ignored the advice and at seventy-eight was still going strong. Forty years ago he had been in love with Marcia Cabot, who was then a very different person from the brisk spinster Barry remembered. Now old Jessup liked her nephew, and was rather flattered that the youngster was willing to waste time on an octogenarian.

When Barry admitted that he had come for advice in "a sort of a jam," his host was increasingly flattered. They chatted of unimportant matters during dinner, while the old butler was coming and going, but after the meal Jessup led his guest into the library with a gleam of excitement in his faded eyes.

That this exemplary youth had got into a "jam" of any kind intrigued him. He suspected that there was a woman in it. He established Barry before the open fire with plenty of cigarettes within reach, and looked expectant.

"I'm going to tell you the whole

yarn," Barry began and, to the colonel's surprise, went back to his boyhood. He described the day of fishing, J. C. Bleeker's effect on his subsequent career, his hero worship, and the gambler's reappearance in New York.

"The man's been a dominating figure all through my life," he interpolated. He let the colonel get the jolt of Strong's profession as he himself had got it. He dwelt also on his own childhood friendship and recent experiences with Janet Perry.

"I haven't seen her for a year," Jessup reflected. "It was easy enough then to tell what she was heading for. Too bad! She's amazingly pretty—and there must have been something fine in her, for your aunt liked her."

Barry resumed his story and when he brought in his first interview with young Howson, and Uncle Alfred's prediction, Jessup looked thoughtful. The long narrative omitted only all mention of Tony the Cat. It ended with the visit of Hennessy and the revelations in the morning newspapers. The old man's face as he listened grew very serious.

"You chose the right word when you described the situation," he commented. "A 'jam' is what it is."

"That's the way it looks to me," Barry admitted.

"What do you advise?"

"Sit tight, as you're doing. That's all you can do just now."

"Do you think I ought to try to square Hennessy — for the present, anyway?"

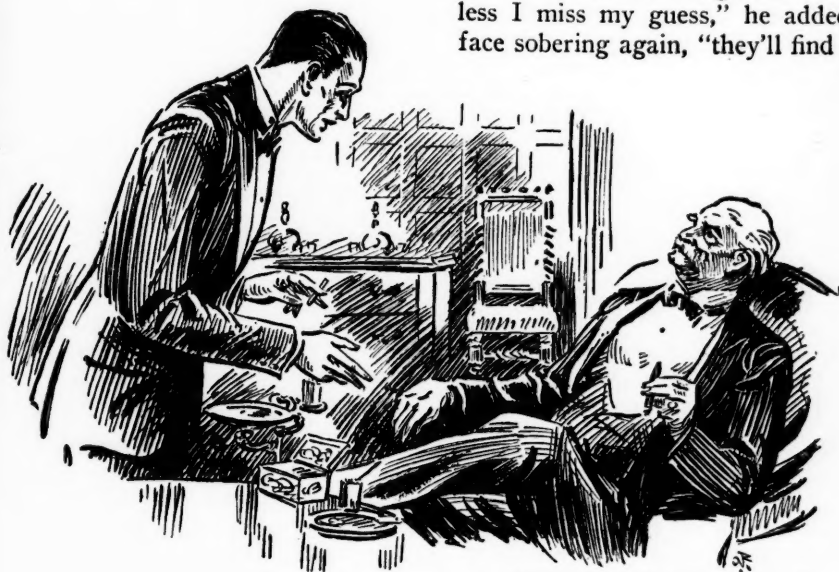
"No. If he's straight, as a lot of them are, it will annoy him. If he isn't straight it will convince him that you've got something serious to hide, and he'll bleed you white."

"That's what I think. But I didn't

like his cryptic remarks about my having some surprises coming."

"They're always making cryptic remarks. Cryptic remarks are their stock in trade. Don't let them worry you."

and the police are desperate. There's been too much of this casual murdering and getting away with it. The newspapers are making an awful howl. So the police are looking for a victim—a lamb for the slaughter. And unless I miss my guess," he added, his face sobering again, "they'll find one."



"You mean they'll frame some one?"

The old man's momentary seriousness was passing. He smiled and nodded toward the cigarette box on the table at his guest's elbow. In the ardor of his recital Barry had let his cigarette go out.

"Do you think I ought to talk to a lawyer about this affair?" he asked as he lit another cigarette.

Telling the story had relieved his mind. He was almost sure he had been making mountains out of molehills.

"Not yet. Probably you won't have to do it at all. As far as I can see, you're 'sitting pretty!' Of course, you understand the whole situation. The underworld knows exactly who killed Skelly, but the police can't get a thing out of any one who knows,

"You mean they'll frame some one?"

"They will — or the gangsters will. The gangsters may toss the police something to satisfy them and the newspapers and to save the real culprit, who is evidently a leader among them. It won't be the first time that's been done. I knew Tom Osborne pretty well," he went on retrospectively. "He told me that while he was doing that altruistic stunt of his as warden of Sing Sing Prison three men that he was absolutely convinced were innocent died in the electric chair."

"Do you think he was right?"

"He may have been. It's entirely possible."

"That makes one feel rather sick."

Barry drew a quick breath. Again he was thinking of Brian Strong. He

told himself he was always thinking of Brian Strong—when he wasn't thinking of Janet or of Dan Skelly or of Tony the Cat. Strange thoughts these, for a mind trained to think in figures!

"It does." Jessup was speaking. "There are a good many things in our civilization that make one feel rather sick, my boy. You'll notice that more as you grow older."

For a long time they sat in companionable silence, smoking and staring at the fire. Then the old man spoke so abruptly that his guest started.

"Are you interested in that Perry giri?"

"Very much, colonel."

"Are you in love with her?"

"No—at least, I don't think I am," Barry added with less conviction. "I'm trying to find out," he went on slowly. "She's on my mind most of the time, if that means anything."

"Good Lord, boy, you ought to know," Jessup said almost irritably.

"A week ago I'd have told you there wasn't a chance of it, and I'd have thought I was right. But since this mess we're in came up I've been amazed by the extent of my anxiety about Janet. I must be more interested than I realized or I wouldn't worry so much."

Jessup sighed.

"Young fellows were different in my day," he contributed. "By God, if we were in love we knew it."

CHAPTER XV

BARRY HEARS A CALL



WHEN Barry reached home he was not wholly surprised to hear the sounds of revelry coming from the next apartment. He and Janet had agreed that the

gang must be welcomed once or twice, if only to avoid arousing their enmity.

She was right, too, no doubt, in her assumption that they would soon fall away when she ceased to be their hostess and banker. The tragic episode at the Cockcrow had given her a good excuse for a waning interest in night clubs and her companions there.

Moreover, it was clear from Hennesy's list that some of the bunch had not followed their circles' excellent rule of a clamped jaw in the face of trouble. They had prattled, and they would naturally assume that Janet's changed attitude was at least partly explained by her resentment of that prattle.

He had arranged with the General to bring him half a dozen newspapers early every morning, and he was awake at six, after a restless night, when he heard the thump of the dropped journals outside his door. He got out of bed and, opening the door, took them in.

Simultaneously the Perrys' door yawned and Janet appeared on the threshold reaching out for a corresponding assortment of newspapers. Conscious of pyjamas and dressing gowns both darted back, but first they had exchanged weary-eyed glances full of eloquence.

Barry rolled up the dark window shades, slipped back into bed, propped himself comfortably with pillows and skimmed over the morning headlines, passing with an eyeflash all that did not refer to the Skelly murder.

It was immediately clear there was no abatement of interest in the case. The journalistic shriek for the arrest of the murderer was louder and more far-reaching than ever. Police and city officials were heeding it. The police

department had received an ultimatum from the mayor promising an epoch-making shake-up unless the murderer could be produced within three days.

The police were throwing out nets for the two Boscós, for Jackknife Casey, and the Featherbed, for Brian Strong and "Ten Grand" Mantell, the last named being a well-known gambler who was said to play for no starting-stake less than ten thousand dollars, and who was known to be one of Skelly's big creditors.

All the gentlemen concerned had been amazingly elusive since the night of the murder. Not one of them had appeared in his usual haunts, but the police claimed to know where they were and promised to produce any one of them against whom there was credible evidence.

The police commissioner was singularly curt with reporters. The Boscós, he asserted, were right here in New York where he could put his hands on them. Brian Strong was in Philadelphia, also within reach of those efficient hands. He did not claim to know the exact whereabouts of Jackknife Casey and the Featherbed, but they were not important. They were merely handy men for the Boscós and had run their errands.

He spoke feelingly of "Ten Grand" Mantell, on whom, he said, the police were keeping a fixed and steady eye. "Ten Grand" it appeared, was the closest friend of Brian Strong, and shared with him the reputation of a peacemaker and a square player.

One morning ten days after the murder, and almost before Barry's wicket was open for business, a check was thrust through it, clutched in a talon-like hand that seemed afraid to release the bit of paper. Without looking at the check Barry glanced at the owner

of the hand; and as he met the colorless eyes on the other side of the wicket a slight chill struck him. He had not heard the man approach and now he knew why.

"Boss said y'd know me," an urgent and husky voice assured him. "Saw yuh at de nose bag wit' him wunst. Boss wants dis kale."

Barry slowly unfolded the check and took his time to study it. Meanwhile Dink the Shadow made it clear that he was not used to banks. He was as noiseless as his nickname suggested, but he changed his stance from foot to foot like a soft-shoe dancer and his thin features twitched with nervousness.

"Boss said t'give yuh dis," he hastily added, and dropped a note he had also been palming in the talonlike hand. The note was short. It read:

MY DEAR CABOT,

Please cash the accompanying check for thirty thousand and give the money to Dink—the bearer. He's more reliable than you might imagine from my reception of him at the Ritz that night.

BRIAN STRONG.

"Wait a minute."

Barry closed his cash drawer, slipped out of the cage and heard the door lock behind him, and hurried into young Howson's private office. In silence he laid the check and the open note on the desk before the branch manager. Howson read them at a glance and whistled softly.

"That's his signature," he said, "both on the check and the note."

"I know it is. Then it's all right to cash the check?"

"Sure this messenger is Dink?"

"Yes. He turned up inopportunely at our table the night Strong dined with me. Don't you remember? You saw him, too, and the frozen face he

got from Strong. You spoke of it the next morning."

Howson nodded.

"I remember. His picture was in the pretty album they sent to Uncle Alfred from the gallery. Dink's as unprepossessing a customer as one would find in a long hunt, but that report of Strong said Dink was his henchman." He rose. "I'll come in and have a look at him. It's easy enough to believe Strong needs a lot of cash right now, and he doesn't dare to come for it himself."

When both young men were in the cage Howson gave the messenger a casual inspection and nodded.

"All right," he told Barry. "I'll bring in the money." He addressed Dink. "How does Mr. Strong want it?" "Grands."

When Howson returned Barry counted out thirty one-thousand-dollar notes and the talonlike hand clutched them. The next instant the "Shadow" was gone.

"He took a big chance coming here," Howson mused aloud. "Banks aren't his appropriate background in the daytime. He must have been on the rack while he waited.

Howson was still lingering in the cage and he showed no immediate intention of leaving. It was still only five minutes past nine and there was no one else before the window.

"Your friend Strong seems to be in this business up to his necktie," Howson added. "I dined with my uncle last night and he told me something that surprised me."

If he had been about to repeat Uncle Alfred's confidence he thought better of it. Two persons suddenly appeared before the wicket—a young man to make a deposit and a young girl with a twenty-five dollar check

which she desired cashed in "fives, ones, and silver." Howson strolled out of the cage, and in the rush of the next few hours Barry forgot to speculate over Uncle Alfred's revelation.

He dined before returning to his rooms that night and reached the haven of his sitting-room a little after eight. The doorman known as "the General" informed Barry that his telephone had been ringing ever since six o'clock. Young Cabot received the information with a depressed nod. His program for the evening was two hours of reading and then to bed, but first he must see Janet. He telephoned to her apartment and received no response.

The General, summoned from the lower regions, was for once allowed to complete his sentences and made the most of the privilege. He reported that Mrs. and Miss Perry had gone out about two o'clock and had not returned. He added that they both seemed worried. They had called a taxicab and had gone away in it.

Barry was not alarmed, for Janet, who could dance ten miles in a night without fatigue, never walked half a block if she could help it. Neither did Mrs. Perry, who had not the exercise of dancing. As to the worry, Janet had been worried for days and her aunt was a congenital worrier who, having no cares in the world, wore features continually puckered by acute anxiety.

Barry was relieved to have the rest of the evening to himself. He wanted to think things over. There was nothing he had to do immediately—the advice of Colonel Jessup had temporarily relieved his mind on that score and he tried to convince himself that "headquarters" would continue to leave Janet and himself alone.

Hennessy, who was no fool, had decided that the couple had seen nothing or, even if they had, the man they saw was merely poor Dan Skelly in his fatal agony. There was nothing to gain by dwelling on that.

The real purpose of his investigation, Barry now realized, had been to discover whether they had seen the cat-like Tony Bosco. Apparently some one at their table or very near it had caught a glimpse of Tony and had given Hennessy the tip. Hennessy might have one or more witnesses ready to testify to Tony's presence in or near that corridor—a strong card for Hennessy if his witnesses were convincing.

The telephone bell rang sharply. Barry answered it. At the sound of the voice at the other end his body grew tense.

"That you, Cabot?" The voice was Strong's. He would have known it among thousands. "Can you spare me an hour? It's important. In fact, I'm holding you up to your promise to do something for me on demand."

There was no hesitation in the young man's hearty response.

"Of course, Mr. Strong. Are you coming here?"

"No." The voice, which had been very serious, brightened a trifle. "Don't I wish I could! I'm asking you to take a little run uptown." He gave a number on Sixty-Seventh Street. "It's business, old man, and time presses. Can you start at once?"

"I'll be with you as soon as a taxi can get me there."

"Fine!" There was a definite lessening of the tension of the voice at the other end of the wire. "You see, the boys at headquarters have made up their minds that they want to see more of me. They're hustling me into the Tombs to-night."

"Good Lord!"

"Don't let it worry you. Of course, they merely want me as a witness. I may be released on bail right away. But hustle along, please. I've got a few matters to attend to before I take my journey."

"I'm starting!"

Barry hung up the receiver and for a long moment stood staring blankly ahead of him. In vain he assured himself that Strong was right in emphasizing the unimportance of his arrest. The young man's nerves, already upset by the episodes of the past fortnight, were jumping. He recalled Jessup's words, uttered the night he had last dined with the colonel.

"They'll toss the police something to satisfy them and the newspapers and to save the real culprit. It won't be the first time that's been done. . . . Three innocent men have died in the electric chair. . . ."

CHAPTER XVI

DINK MAKES A LOAN

BARRY picked up a passing taxicab and ordered the driver to "step on it." The words reminded him of his memorable ride with Tony the Cat. Black depression settled over him. He had begun to hope that he might escape that corner of the Skelly net, but here it was twisting around him again.

Barry's driver was "stepping on it." The fool was taking all sorts of chances. Just now, by the narrowest possible margin, he had missed a cab shooting out of a side street. Well, let him act like the lunatic he was. The thought actually struck Barry that it might save a lot of trouble later on if the driver smashed up, right now,



Dink's features twitched with uneasiness

his cab, himself and his passenger.

With a swerve and a jerk that almost sent him off the seat, the cab stopped before the address Barry was seeking.

"'Most passed it," said the driver airily.

Barry grinned back wanly as he paid the fare and added the expected generous tip. Something in him responded to this care-free young devil who at least was as skillful as he was reckless. The exchange of grins, the momentary contact of youth with youth, had braced the passenger; but he envied the driver as the latter again "stepped on it" and shot away.

The house Barry approached was one of New York's typical old-fashioned brownstone structures, with a short flight of steps leading to its double doors. The street was a good one, just off Fifth Avenue, and everything about the building was in excellent condition. It might still be a private house or a former private house made over into apartments.

The visitor inclined toward the latter theory when his ring of the bell was answered by a man in quiet livery, who ushered him into a well-furnished hall. The man's expression, when he heard Barry's name, showed that he knew the caller was expected. "This way, please," he said and immediately led Cabot up the staircase to a second-floor room.

There he knocked, pushed the door slightly ajar without waiting for an answer, and then departed, leaving the visitor to enter unannounced.

There were four men in the room, but Barry's eyes sought and immediately found Brian Strong, who was seated at a flat-top desk. Behind him, in the shadows of a corner, was an outline that might have been another shadow. The loyal Dink was obviously on the job. Near the door was a silent waiting figure in plain clothes; a similar figure of familiar outlines stood beside one of the two windows, with its hands in its pockets, lost in contemplation of the street below.

Strong rose briskly, coming forward with an outstretched hand, which Barry grasped heartily. Already, as always in this man's presence, the familiar attraction had asserted itself and he felt his mental attitude changing. A brief resentment he had experienced died in him.

"It's good of you to come, old man," Strong said in his usual buoyant

tone, "but I knew you would," he added with an engaging smile. "Sit down and I'll tell you why I sent out the SOS."

He pointed to a chair beside the writing table, and when Barry had taken it Strong dropped back into his own chair, rested his elbows on the table, and leaned confidentially toward his visitor.

"This is business," he said in a low voice which might or might not have reached the ears of the Shadow and the big man at the window. "When I sent Dink to cash that check I didn't expect this urgent invitation from the police quite so soon. As I said, I may be out on bail in a day or two. Then again, I may not. These gentlemen from headquarters seem to be collecting human souvenirs of the Skelly affair and there's no telling how soon they'll be ready to part with us. I'm going on the theory that I may be in the Tombs for some time. Can you tell me the amount of my present balance at your bank?"

"I remember the balance after your check was cashed. Have you cashed any checks or made any deposits since then?"

"No."

Barry reflected an instant, took a pencil and notebook from his pocket, wrote something on a page, tore out the page and handed it to his host. Strong glanced at the figures and nodded.

"That's about what I thought."

He walked over to the open fire, dropped the bit of paper into the flames and watched it burn. Then he returned to the desk and, still standing, began to empty his pockets. They contained a flat gold watch, a small gold pocket pencil, a fountain pen, a folding check book, a monogrammed linen

handkerchief in its original folds and a roll of bank notes. He counted the money. The large figure at the window, seemingly drawn by this display of affluence, strolled toward the desk. Barry recognized the imperturbable Hennessy.

"Oh—how are you?" he said, a little taken back.

"Good evening, Mr. Cabot."

The detective spoke casually, but his expression reminded Barry of Hennessy's prediction about the surprises young Cabot was to receive in connection with the Skelly case. Clearly this was one of them.

Having counted his money and restored the other articles to his pockets, Strong detached the outer bank note and offered the roll to Barry.

"Could you take care of this for me?" he asked. "It isn't as large as it was, but it's more than I care to carry about just now."

"Of course."

"No receipt, please, but put it some place where you can get at it in a hurry," Strong added as the young man counted the money; and Barry thrust the roll into his pocket.

"I suppose no one can change this for me," Strong mused, indicating the lonely "grand" Barry held out in his hand.

"I'll change it in the morning and bring the money to you at noon," he promised.

Strong passed over the bank note, and, drawing a handful of loose bills from his trouser pocket, proceeded to count them.

"Only a little over four hundred," he remarked. "Do you happen to have any more on you?"

"Not more than forty or fifty."

Barry produced what he had and handed it over.

"I never carry much," he added sedately. All his poise had returned in this familiar atmosphere of money handling and counting. He was so wholly reassured that he did not even call his own attention to the reassurance. But a sudden action of the Shadow brought him back to the Skelly case.

"I gotta few century notes, Boss," Dink huskily brought out.

"You'll need them," his master said. "Dink is to be a guest at the Tombs, too," he mentioned in passing.

"What in hell'd I need it for?" Dink urgently inquired. He was emptying his pockets on his master's desk as he spoke, and the other men followed the little scene with varying degrees of interest. Dink separated the bank notes he held and shoved them directly in front of Strong, who had dropped back into his chair.

"Four centuries, six sawbucks, t'ree fives, an' six case notes," Dink muttered.

Strong nodded and picked up the four one-hundred-dollar bank notes.

"I'll take these till tomorrow," he agreed. "You keep the rest. You'll want to send out for dinner and breakfast, and as I remember the rates in the Tombs neighborhood eighty-one dollars will just about pay for them."

Dink revealed his yellow teeth and returned the smaller bank notes to his pocket. His pale eyes showed a sudden gleam. He had got an uplift over that loan, and this, Barry reflected, was why Strong had taken it. He himself had experienced a similar thrill over his little share in financing the cornered gambler. He and this underworld thug had at least one emotion in common. The fact interested him.

The Shadow dropped back into a chair, hands between his knees, his

pale eyes on Strong's face. Barry found himself harboring the odd suspicion that Dink had a better nature.

"Ready now, Strong?" Hennessy asked briskly.

"Great Scott, no! But I'd be obliged if you and Dixon there would step out into the hall while I have a few words in private with Mr. Cabot. You, too, Dink," he added, and quenched the momentary glow in the Shadow's colorless eyes. The latter rose, however, though already Hennessy was shaking a regretful head.

"Sorry, but it can't be done. We'll go t' the other end of the room an' that's the best we c'n do for you. Come along, you."

This last admonition was to Dink, as Hennessy strolled toward his fellow officer, and the Shadow drifted in his wake like a bog.

Strong began to speak at once in a new voice, urgent and so low that Barry had to bend to catch it.

"I may be in a bad jam," he said, "and yet I hope I needn't tell you that I had nothing whatever to do with Dan Skelly's murder," he stopped to interpolate.

"No, Mr. Strong, you needn't."

The young man's tone brought the other's eyes to his in a deep look.

"That's good of you," Strong said gratefully, "and it makes things easier. However, we've got to face the facts. There's no overestimating the stupidity of the police, and just now New York is yowling for a victim. It's quite possible that I—" he hesitated and then finished with a smile his card associates would have recognized but which Barry had never seen before, "that I may be elected It!"

"Nonsense! That's utterly out of the question!" Barry spoke strongly, but a slow chill slithered down the

length of his spine. Strong did not waste time in argument. That was never his way. He did not argue. He informed.

"You must wonder why I got you into this," he hurried on. "I'll tell you. It's because of the possibility I've mentioned. No other conditions would have made me do it. I wouldn't have brought you here on banking business in a thousand years. You won't hear from me again, and I don't want you to come near me or communicate with me in any way if things go right—Hennessy!" He had broken off abruptly. "Will you take that thousand from Mr. Cabot and get some small notes for me to-morrow morning?"

"I will that," Hennessy promised good-naturedly, coming back for the bank note Barry handed over, while Dink glowered at the cop like a man wronged.

"Hennessy's a good chap in his way," Strong went on in an undertone, as the detective walked back to his place. "It's a big card for him to have me on the leash and I've got him to make a few concessions. One is that you and your friends are not to be called as witnesses simply because, as he tells me, you happened to have an unfortunate table at the Cockerow that night. What's the sense in dragging you into this to prove that poor Dan Skelly was shot?"

"That was mighty thoughtful of you," Barry said quickly.

"You and the lady you were with can't afford to be mixed up with the likes of us," Strong serenely assured him. "Don't come near me," he repeated with sudden emphasis, "unless I send for you. I won't do that unless I'm going up the river. Then I'll need you. But when I want my cash back I'll send a man for it."

"In any case I'll do anything in the world I can."

"Good boy! I oughtn't to let you—but I may have to if the cards run the wrong way. God, perhaps it was a bad day for you when we went fishing!" He drew a quick breath—his first sign of deep feeling. "Now we understand each other," he went on calmly.

"Emergency work only and as a last resort."

"Mr. Strong." The words rushed to the speaker's lips and he could not check them. "Do you know who committed that murder?"

Strong met his eyes.

"I think I do."

"And you're willing to die for him rather than tell who he is! I can't understand that code," Barry muttered through his teeth.

"Willing? Hell, no! Die for that skunk? Of course, I don't want to. I'll give the district attorney the prettiest fight he's ever had before he convicts me. We'll have a trial that'll make the country sit up. But my friends aren't the skunk's friends and his friends aren't mine. They'll do things for him that mine can't do. They'll do anything to save him, and unfortunately Mantell, who's the only square man in the bunch except Skelly himself and the only other man that would have stood by me, was in the wash room when the gun play came off. You see where that leaves me!" Barry saw, and again felt the chill creep down his spine. Strong straightened in his chair, with an entire change of manner.

"That's what I wanted to say," he ended. "It's life or death with me. If I'm indicted, and there's very little doubt that I shall be, you're absolutely out of it unless I'm convicted. I don't

want any misunderstanding about that. You'll only worry me if you interfere. If I'm convicted I'll want a talk with you. Will you come?"

"Anywhere. Any time." It was all Barry could say.

"There are certain things a skunk and his friends will have to do if I'm bumped off," Strong went on, "certain obligations they've got to meet to others that I'm responsible for. If they can get out of it they will, the lying, framing, white-livered crew," he said between his teeth. "I'll leave some thumb-screws behind me to bring them to time."

He rose.

"That's all, my boy. I hope we won't meet again. I had a little personal scheme, harmless enough, in connection with you. But it's off now. This is good-by, unless New York's big thumb goes down."

He got up and grasped the young man's hand. The future Napoleon of finance returned the grip and then stood before him speechless and with an aching throat, as the little boy of fourteen years ago had done when they parted at the old gate in Wheaton. In this moment Barry recalled that parting and the look of the storm-swept sky. Strong released his hand and spoke cheerfully.

"All right, Hennessy, I'm ready. Thanks for your patience. Better toddle along, Cabot," he added as Barry lingered.

But the boy—he was still a boy again in this moment—remained motionless, looking at him.

"Anytime. Anything," he brought out in a choked voice. He stumbled from the room and hurried downstairs, out of the house, toward Fifth Avenue. His association with the underworld, brief though it had been, was teach-

ing him much; or perhaps it was merely bringing to the surface things he had heard or read.

A closed automobile with a watchful-eyed man at the wheel was standing at the curb a few doors away. Barry told himself the one thing he could not endure was the sight of that little group entering that automobile. He strode along as if pursued by furies, as indeed he was.

Feeling the need of privacy he stopped a passing cab on the Avenue, gave the driver his home address, and sank wretchedly into a corner of the shelter he had sought.

What next? The answer seemed as inevitable as the question. Janet was next. He must see her. The episode at Strong's uptown flat had not taken more than thirty minutes. It was still early. Janet would not have gone to bed. He *must* see Janet.

CHAPTER XVII

JAN BECOMES SUSPICIOUS



AFTER that it seemed natural to find Janet at home and alone, Mrs. Perry having already made the exodus to her own room. Janet led the way to the fireplace and their favorite armchairs.

"I was sure you'd come," she said as they sat down. "I don't know why, but I expected you."

"I have news for you."

Barry settled back in his chair, took a cigarette from the box she indicated on the stand between them, and lit it while the peace of the quiet room enveloped him like a slowly rising tide. He was finding in her actual presence the comfort the thought of Janet could never bring. She was all Janet of Wheaton to-night—quiet, sympathetic,

understanding, subdued, very much as she had been on that memorable night after Marcia Cabot's funeral.

"News?" she sighed. "I suppose it isn't good news, by any chance. That doesn't seem possible."

"It is, though. I've just learned that you're not to be troubled any more over the Skelly matter. You won't be called as a witness. Neither will any of the gang—though I dare say they'll be disappointed."

Janet drew a quick breath.

"That is good news." She added, with a curious glance at him. "You don't seem much relieved by it. Think of what it means to you. Yet you look all in."

"I'm relieved, of course. But I'm a bit done up, too. I'm one of the tired business men you read about."

He was wondering whether he ought to tell her of that tragic interview with Strong. He decided against it, for no reason except a reluctance to reopen the memory of that haunting episode. He wanted to continue at peace, alone with Janet, with the world and its problems shut out.

"This is good," he sighed after a time.

She seemed to understand his mood and for a long time they remained silent, though now his eyes were oftener on her than on the fire. She, too, was plainly tired, but she was unusually lovely. The hard look she had worn of late had left her face, perhaps because the face was without its usual vivid "make-up."

He liked the gown she wore—a lovely thing of green and silver that suited her copper-toned hair and the lights in her brown eyes. He clasped his hands at the back of his smooth black head and sank deeper into his big chair.

"I've been doing a lot of thinking lately, Barry," Janet said at last. "It's getting to be a habit, and perhaps I've strained my mind. Probably that's why I'm so stupid to-night."

"You're never stupid—and just now you're wonderfully restful."

She turned a lighted face to him.

"That's one of the nicest things you could say to me. Have you had a hard day?" she went on as he remained silent.

"Yes—very."

She gave him another chance to talk but he did not take it. At last she spoke again.

"Will it bore you if I tell you what I've been thinking about? Would you rather I kept quiet and let you rest?"

He would have preferred just that, but he said the right thing.

"Of course not. Tell me anything you like. You know I'm interested."

"I'm never sure you are," she said unexpectedly. "I've never been sure since I used to trail around after you when I was six. You meant everything to me, even then. You always did. But I got used to being patient and having you take me on when none of the boys showed up."

"I was a selfish little whelp," he murmured.

"You were, and of course I spoiled you. So did your aunt. You have never had to think of any one but yourself, Barry, so you never learned how."

"I'm afraid that's true." He pondered the charge for a moment and then added with a twisted smile, "But don't worry about it. I have an idea that I'm in for a good post graduate course of experience along those very lines."

"What do you mean by that?" She was looking at him with quickened in-

terest, but self-consciously. He saw that she had misunderstood him.

"I don't want you to have me on your mind as a burden—ever," she offered.

"I wasn't thinking of you when I spoke—though you are on my mind and I know now that you always will be. I was thinking of some one else."

"A girl?"

"Heavens, no. A man!"

She dismissed the man with a gesture, and again her tired face took on that illumined look.

"What made you say you will always have me on your mind?" she asked in a low voice.

"Because I've just learned that I shall." He smiled at her. "I suppose I've fallen in love with you, Jan. I seem to have all the symptoms."

"Don't be silly!"

The blood had rushed to the roots of her copper-colored hair. He looked at her in surprise. Then, he lowered his arms and drew his chair closer to her.

"I believe you've known it all the time," he said sternly.

"I don't know it now, and neither do you. I wish you wouldn't chose this particular night when I seem to have the weight of the world on me, to joke about serious things."

"You bet they're serious things," he admitted.

She waited, but he was leaning back in his chair again with the air of a man who had said all he meant to say. She could have shaken him.

"You don't approve of a thing about me," she remarked abruptly.

He sighed and came back to her from the room up in Sixty-Seventh Street.

"I approve passionately of four things," he told her. "Your loyalty,

your looks, your magnetism, and a sporting spirit you've always had. I think the sporting spirit is going to pull you above the other things that——"

"That you simply can't endure in me," she finished for him as he hesitated.

"That I don't like as much as the things I've mentioned," he substituted.

"If this is a love scene," she said slowly, looking into the fire, "it's a queer one."

"It's an infernally queer one," he admitted.

"Could you really care for any one you disapprove of as utterly as you do of me?"

He sighed.

"I don't disapprove of you now, though you're spoiling the evening. And it was so restful."

She gave him an odd look.

"That's all this means to him," she told the whispering fire. "A little relaxation after a hard day. I thought so."

In the wakeful hours of many succeeding nights Barry Cabot thought of a dozen answers he might have made to that comment—varying answers but all of them substantial proofs of his sincerity to a girl whose self-respect was trailing its wings in the dust.

At the moment, incredibly, he made none of them. There were various reasons for this. He was tired to the soul. He was horribly depressed. The inner caution that was so basic a part of him was reasserting itself. He had already said much more than he had meant to say so soon.

His singing nerves were quieting but his thoughts were still in chaos. He was not up to discussion, not up to argument and vows and protestations. What he needed was to sit at peace

until the inner turmoil that was the inevitable aftermath of his day should subside.

His mind was at ease about Janet. She was not to be drawn into the Skelly case, and in the end the Skelly case might prove the turning point of her new life. It had opened her eyes.

in her dark path vanished. She spoke abruptly.

"Barry, I haven't talked much to you about my father, since we were children, have I?"

He welcomed the change of subject. If she must talk, and apparently she must, by all means let her talk of



She held the door wide for him to pass out

It had sent her scurrying back into the personality of Janet of Wheaton.

Looking at her as she sat there, so young, so lovely, so poised, it seemed incredible to him that he had ever heard her clear diction thicken, had ever seen that film over her brilliant eyes. The mere memory of these things gave him an inner chill.

Enough had been said for to-night. He had told her he loved her and the rest could wait.

He sat silent, gazing at the fire, and to the girl beside him the torch that for a few blessed moments he had held up

something as remote as that engineer in South America.

"Not since we were youngsters," he confirmed. "We used to talk a lot about him at Wheaton—and don't you remember our games with him and J. C. Bleecker as our heroes? Mighty romantic figures to us."

"Then."

Her bitter emphasis on the word made him turn to look at her.

"Have you heard anything new about your father. Is he coming up here?"

"No, and he's not coming here. He's

never coming here—at least, he never even hints at coming and now I'm sure he never will. I used to picture him toiling day and night to give me all the luxuries I have, and living his wild life without any comforts himself. It made me awfully unhappy. I've longed for him all my life. I'd rather have had him, penniless, than be alone with all he could send me. But since I came to New York my notions of him have changed. I believe he's supremely selfish. The money he gives me is simply a sop to his conscience—if he has one—and I'm sure he can give it without sacrifice. The friend who acts for him here told me when I was old enough to understand that my father had a large income and that I could have anything I wanted, in reason. I suspect now that father has married again in South America, or that at least he has his own establishment there and perhaps a new set of children. There must be something to account for his utter indifference to me."

Barry's sex loyalty felt called upon to defend the absent man.

"He has certainly provided for you mighty well."

"That's something," she admitted—"but that's all. Mr. Haven, the friend who acts for him, sent for me to-day and gave me a letter that was part of a budget of mail father sent up to the New York representative of his firm."

"What is his firm?"

"It's a Brazilian mining and construction company but it sends father all over the continent. The few letters he writes me come from all sorts of places. Mr. Haven is the head of the New York office."

"What sort of man is he?"

"Delightful. I used to wish I'd had the luck to have a father like him, but now I'm not so sure."

"Why not?" Barry was interested.

"Oh, I don't know. It's just a feeling that's developed in these last years. I've never tried to think out the explanation of it, but"—she was evidently trying to do so now—"perhaps one reason is that he's so terribly cautious in what he says about father. He doesn't speak of him as if father were a man he liked and admired. He becomes absolutely businesslike when I ask questions and he cuts down his answers to the bone, though when we're on any other subject he's very chatty, and I've always loved to hear him talk. I don't see him often, not more than a few times a year, unless I go to his office in some emergency, but we've known each other so long that we're awfully good friends. I'm perfectly sure now that he doesn't approve of father—and it's his manner when I bring up the subject that made me think there might be an irregular establishment. Still, even if there is, I don't see why he should mind it," she added with the large tolerance born of her recent associations. "Men don't mind such things, do they?"

She waited a moment and seeing that Barry was evidently cranking up his mind gave it some additional work to do.

"I thought possibly there might be something wrong with the firm, too. But Mr. Haven would hardly be critical of that, would he, since he's in it himself?"

"If he's merely the head of the New York office—a salaried man without an interest in the company—he might be intensely critical of everything about the firm," Barry grinned. "By the way, you have some of the letter-heads, haven't you?"

"Yes. Father always writes on them."

"If you'll give me one I'll look up the firm's standing," he suggested briskly.

She hesitated.

"Would that be the right thing to do?"

"Why not? The business standing of any firm is a legitimate subject of inquiry—and this is a matter between you and me. Naturally I wouldn't prattle about anything I found out."

She became a battlefield of doubts.

"I'm not sure I ought to. No suspicion of the firm ever entered my mind till lately and I can't see that it's my business to nose into father's financial affairs. It doesn't seem quite—what's the word I want?"

"Filial?"

"Yes, filial. You see what I mean?"

"Of course."

"And if we found that anything was wrong it would be horrible. It would add the turn of the screws to what I'm going through. Naturally, too, I'd feel that I couldn't use any more of the money he sends me."

"Then you'd better let the matter rest," Barry hastily agreed. "You say you saw Mr. Haven to-day?"

"Yes. He sent for me and gave me my allowance. Dad explained in his letter that he was just starting a big job that would keep him in the interior awhile. It was just one of his usual matter-of-fact notes. He simply wants me off his mind. I asked Mr. Haven what the new job was and he said it was a bridge."

Barry got up to go.

"He's evidently a fine engineer, and you may be all wrong about the other matter."

"Just the same," Janet rose also and went with him to the door, "the other matter was what made me so anxious to work at my singing. I want to be able to earn my own living. I want to write to my father that he needn't have me on his mind any more. I'm buckling right down to work. I've cut everything else out and it's going to stay out. Will you remember that?" she ended with a meaning, "My wild oats have been sown. Once and for all, my fling is over."

"Good girl!" said Barry. He looked down at her with shining eyes. "By Jove, Jan, you don't know how happy it makes me to have you say that!"

"I don't deserve any credit. It's easy," she sighed. "I don't want that sort of life any more. The first thought of it brings back the picture of poor Dan Skelly, and of the other—the Cat—"

She shivered.

"Of course, you don't want any more of it. I knew you'd sicken of it soon in any case. This has merely hastened your cure."

Her bobbed head, with its shining cap of copper-colored hair, came just to Barry's heart. She looked up at him and he saw tears in her eyes. An impulse seized him to take her in his arms, to kiss away those tears.

Janet slowly opened the door for Barry to pass out.

"Good night," he said quietly. "I'll see you to-morrow."

For a moment before the door swung to he held her eyes. Her tears had dried, but the expression of those eyes made him stop short.

THIS BRILLIANT NEW NOVEL WILL BE CONTINUED IN THE OCTOBER 5th
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Gallantry

Three soldiers of fortune fraternize with the rebellion in San Sebastian

By John Murray Reynolds



CARSON'S face was heavy-featured and almost brutish, and his thick body looked unwieldy, though in reality he was agile enough. He was unquestionably and unashamedly dirty, with a six-day beard to make it worse. The beard obscured both the old scar on his chin, where a Spanish bullet had nicked him at El Caney, and an almost invisible line on his neck, where a yellow fanatic had slashed his throat long ago in the Boxer rebellion. Dirty, in-



"Giving us away to save his own skin!"

dolent, exuding a strong odor of cheap wine, he lay sprawled in the shade of a ceiba tree and snored.

It was hard to tell much about Carson's age, except that many years had passed since he was young. Youth had left him long ago, in the course of a lifetime spent in the armies of a dozen nations. There was a rumor that he had held high commissions in his time. Perhaps it was true, but now he was merely one of a score of Americans who formed part of Don Paolo Saez's tatterdemalion army that was to raise the standard of revolt in San Sebastian.

John Russell, who stood and stared down at the sleeping Carson without attempting to conceal his disgust, was a sharply contrasting type. He was young and lithe and clean-limbed, with a proud carriage to his head and a dreamy look in his gray eyes. Life, to him, was still fresh and interesting, for the gay paint had not yet been knocked off to show the corrosion underneath.

The strange alchemy that makes filibusters and soldiers of fortune out of men who, on the surface, are just like their fellows had drawn Russell southward to this fever-ridden jungle clearing where the ragged rebel army lay in hiding; but he still had his ideals and principles. He might have been the counterpart of the young Carson of a quarter century ago; but he neither suspected this nor saw any prophecy of his own future in the repulsive figure before him. He only knew that the recumbent man looked like all that a soldier should not be; so he prodded him with his foot.

Carson awoke, yawned, and ran his hands through his matted gray hair. Then he lifted himself on one elbow and surveyed the younger man with a yellow-fanged grin.

"Hello, youngster! You look too clean to be real. Where the hell did you drop in from?"

Carson's voice was harsh and somewhat sneering, and the tone was one of malicious raillery. Russell flushed, but answered quietly.

"I came in from the coast yesterday," he said. "I'm Captain Russell, and General Saez told me to report to you. That is, I suppose you're Major Carson."

"Hell, yes, with all of two hundred men in my battalion! So you're the young feller they told me about." He sat up, yawned again, looked the newcomer over from head to foot with offensive thoroughness, and spat resoundingly. "Who ever told you that you could command a company, boy?"

"General Saez seems to think so!" Russell retorted hotly. "If you object, you're quite at liberty to—"

"Oh, well, never mind! Life's too short to argue. I don't care what kind of infants they send me. This army's

a joke, anyway. Over in that clump of palmettos you'll find about sixty mangy and half starved derelicts picking chiggers out of their feet. They're your company—go and get acquainted."

Without another word Carson lay down and went back to his siesta.

After hesitating for a moment, the young captain turned and walked over to inspect his company. He found that his superior officer had described them accurately, if harshly. Mostly peons who had joined the rebellion on the chance that it might be easier than regular work, they hardly looked like the raw material from which heroes are made.

Russell had changed a number of his ideas in the past few days. Where he had expected to find a small but disciplined army, inspired by the flame of patriotism and eagerly training for its task, he had encountered an untrained mob of irregulars skulking in the jungle and spending most of their time in sleep. The whole thing sickened him, but he was too stubborn to back out now.

As Carson was Russell's immediate superior, the two men were naturally thrown together a good deal during those days of waiting; and the feeling between them grew steadily worse. Carson's manner was harsh and domineering to everybody, but he seemed to find a particular delight in venting his sarcasm on Russell. Perhaps it was his own wasted youth reflected in the younger man that set him on edge, stirring him to make a snarling protest against what life had done to him; but Russell did not understand that. After a day or so he made no attempt to conceal his resentment, and Carson retaliated with barbed gibes that added fuel to the fire.

On one occasion Russell approached the older man regarding ammunition.

"I find my men only have six or eight rounds apiece," he said. "Will there be more soon?"

Carson rubbed his stubby beard and grinned with half his mouth.

"Use your head, boy! That's what we're waiting for. We're not staying here because we like the scenery."

"You mean it's on the way?"

"Right first time! Did you ever try thinking now and then?"

"Frequently; but the way this army is run, a little thing like no ammunition would be no surprise. Can't you—"

"Listen, boy! I don't like rotting in this jungle a bit better than you do, but we've got to wait till the shells come; so shut up and don't bother me. I want to sleep."

He deliberately turned his back.

After standing for a moment with clenched fists, Russell abruptly turned and walked away. Carson might be trying to goad him into a fight, but he wasn't going to start anything like that until he was ready.

Several times they nearly came to blows, but his previous training always reminded Russell that this man was his superior officer, and he held his hand. At least Carson seemed to understand his motives for refraining, and never charged him with cowardice. Once Russell snarled between clenched teeth:

"When this war's over, Carson, I'm going to make you eat some of your words!"

"Sure!" replied the other carelessly, while his eyes peered eagerly at a sudden commotion across the clearing. "Sure, any time you like; but there's the pack train with the cartridges. Help me get some before the rest of the outfit grabs them all."

With a fair supply of ammunition in hand at last, the rebel horde—it was scarcely an army—moved slowly through the jungles toward San Sebastian, the capital of the republic. At dusk, five days later, they peered hungrily through the last screen of underbrush and saw the city before them.

General Saez donned a new uniform and addressed the leaders. Their best plan was to stake everything on a bold attempt to seize the capital city, whereupon the rest of the country would probably submit without resistance. The attack was to be made in the morning, and the army was to get what rest it could during the night.

Red sashes had been procured to distinguish the officers, and Russell had found an old cavalry saber, which he belted on outside the sash. Action at last! Some of the disillusionment of the past weeks began to fade under the stimulus of excitement. Even the ragged peons in the ranks began to look more like soldiers, and Carson's bullying tones had taken on an incisive snap.

The rebels slept fitfully during the night, shivering in the dull mist that drenched them, and awaiting the sunrise. The sky was graying when Russell stood with Burke, a red-haired and wild-eyed Irishman commanding another company of the same battalion. Russell was greasing the lock of his revolver with some coconut oil, while the Irishman was grinding the edge of his machete on a flat stone.

"I dreamed of the red wolf last night," observed Burke at last.

Though the stars were paling, it was still dark under the trees, and his voice came strangely from the blackness.

"What does that mean?"

"Trouble and death—perhaps for you and me, perhaps not; but certainly

for a lot of us. I had the same dream on the eve of Managua, where my outfit was nearly wiped out. It's a bad sign."

"Old women's tales!" snarled an unmistakable voice, as Carson loomed up through the darkness. "The boy here is nervous enough without your filling his empty head with such yarns!"

Russell's patience snapped at last, and he leaped to his feet with an oath.

"Keep your mouth shut about me Carson, or I'll knock your damned block off!" he snarled.

The other only laughed.

"Just keep calm for half an hour, boy. Then you'll have plenty of fighting. Now assemble your companies—we're about to move out."

He walked away.

"He's a louse," said Burke, spitting expressively. "I've seen men like him get shot in the back by their own men."

"He's not worth the trouble," replied Russell, and they separated to muster their respective companies.

II

THE attack began at dawn, when a horde of ragged men swarmed out of the jungle and rushed the Federal outposts to the east of San Sebastian. They poured into the narrow streets of the old city with a chorus of yells, and many of the citizens came out to join the insurgent ranks. They caught a roving cavalry patrol in the Plaza of San Leo, and shot it down to a man. They swept victorious through the eastern part of the city, but met their first check at the broad Paseo del Prado.

At ten o'clock they were still moving forward, though slowly. At noon they were halted, but were stubbornly clinging to what ground they had

gained. By the middle of the afternoon the revolt was failing fast, and more Federal reinforcements were coming from the western districts every hour. When the day commenced to wane, the rebel cause was hopeless and the end a matter of time.

Carson's battalion, with Russell's company in the lead, was among the first to enter the city. Russell's men surprised him during that long day's fighting, for they showed a more stubborn courage than he had expected. There was nothing particularly inspired about them, little trace of the gallantry and élan of first-class troops, but they kept their heads under fire and clung stubbornly to their ground.

In the late afternoon, with the tide turning against them, they were still holding an advanced position on the flank when Carson crawled up to Russell where the captain crouched behind a low stone wall.

"You're a major now, youngster," he said with a wolfish grin.

"What do you mean?"

"The colonel was killed ten minutes ago; so I'm commanding the regiment—what's left of it—and you inherit the battalion. Take your men, fall back to the Prado, and prepare for another stand. Now get a move on!"

Russell nodded. A few moments later he had withdrawn his battalion from the firing line and was taking them back on the double.

The Paseo del Prado ran all the way across the city, a broad avenue with grass and flowers and a double row of palm trees down the middle. Groups of wild-eyed rebels were hastily erecting a barricade along its length. All the wagons, coaches, or private carriages that could be found were dragged up and overturned along the strip of grass that ran down the

center. Furniture was carried out from the surrounding houses and piled in an irregular rampart. The green iron park chairs formed an outer obstruction. A warehouse was broken open, and its bags of flour and beans and potatoes were added to the barricade. There was no time to do more, for the men building the rampart were alone. The rebels' reserve had long since been used up.

Standing on the side of an overturned wagon, John Russell watched the building of the flimsy defense, and shouted encouragement to his men in a voice that was little more than a hoarse croaking. He still wore the red sash that was the rebel emblem, with an old cavalry saber belted on the outside. His coating of dust and sweat and grime was now as thick as those of the rest, and only his accent marked him for a northerner.

In Russell's heart there was a deep and increasing bitterness. He had come south to join the rebellion because he believed in its justice, because he wanted to fight for liberty. He had looked to find patriotism and resolution and gallantry, and instead he had found—Carson the bully, and a comic opera rebellion which he felt to be doomed from the start.

The backbone of the insurrection was formed by a horde of unthinking peons blindly loyal to their leader, and the foreign officers were its sinews. From the outset the attempt had been ill managed and destined to fail. That, however, was not the fault of the junior officers, like Carson and himself, but of the native leaders.

Gallantry? Russell's lips twisted in a grimace that was hardly a smile. There was no gallantry. There were petty jealousy and bombastic deceit among the native officers, and a sar-

donic pessimism among the northerners. Life seemed a rather ill conceived jest.

With a shrug, he turned his attention back to the work in hand. From where he stood on the rampart he could see nothing of the progress of the fighting, but he could hear it. The sound of rifle fire was scattering and irregular, falling away to a few detonations in one quarter, only to rise to a swelling crescendo of sound in another as the battle shifted; but the noise came every minute more clearly, the shots continually sounded nearer. Burke came up, slammed a dirty mattress on top of an overturned bureau, and cocked an ear at the sounds of conflict.

"It has the sound of a running fight," he said. "I told you I dreamed of the red wolf. By gorry, I think they've broken!"

Russell shook his head.

"It's not quick enough for that, Tim; but they're certainly in retreat—fast."

The Irishman nodded, and raced for the nearest house and another mattress.

There was something tragic in these preparations for the last hopeless stand of the beaten army—something rather childishly stubborn, yet nevertheless praiseworthy. Russell and the others might not see another day, but at least they could end with a gesture. He was surprised to find how calmly he considered the slenderness of his chances of survival.

For half an hour the rebels had been in full retreat, falling back stubbornly but steadily, house by house and street by street. Russell saw a man run out of the nearest cross street—a man with one arm hanging useless by his side and a saber cut in his shoulder. Eager

hands helped him over the barricade, and he gasped out the news:

"We're breaking fast! *Madre de dios*, the Federals have more men every minute! People say they knew of our attack beforehand and had all the provincial garrisons in readiness."

Russell gripped him by the shoulder. "Are they falling back in good order?" he asked.

"Good enough, *señor*, for our mounted men bring up the rear; but they come fast."

Leaping up on the rampart, Russell blew his whistle and shouted for his men to man the breastworks. They straggled up by twos and threes, adding a last contribution to the flimsy defenses and then unslinging their rifles. Almost immediately came the crisis. From every twisted cross street poured an irregular tide of weary, beaten men wearing the crossed cartridge belts and red sashes of the rebel army. Some ran, some walked, and a few halted for a moment to fire behind them. Many were wounded. Like a breaking wave they swept across the barricade and a little way behind it. Then many whistles trilled, the officers shouted, and the men halted and began to form anew.

Last of all, riding at a trot and firing from the saddle, with their carbines spitting viciously back into the sunset, came such mounted men as the rebels possessed. Carson was with them. They rode through the narrow gaps that had been left in the barricade, assembled near the center of the line, and dismounted.

There was a brief pause, for the Federals had seen the rampart and had hesitated for a moment before making an attack in force. Skirmishers were slipping from door to door as they advanced up the cross streets, and the de-

fenders began to take pot shots at them.

Burke was at Russell's side. He fired once and missed, and swore savagely. After a minute he fired again, catching a blue-clad soldier on the run and knocking him flat on his back in the gutter. He grinned pleasantly and commenced to croon to himself.

Carson, a smear of blood on his unshaven face, ran up to Russell and clutched the younger man's arm. He was more disreputable than ever, but his old indolence had been replaced by a dynamic, savage energy that was like a tonic.

"How many men have you now?" he snapped.

"About a hundred and fifty. Why?" returned Russell, bridling, as always, at the other's arrogant air of authority.

"All right, my bully! We'll hold the barricade with those and the survivors of our cavalry—while we can. It'll give the main body a fighting chance to get out of the city."

Glancing back, Russell saw that the main army was drawn up in irregular columns. Even as he looked, they began to withdraw down the side streets, moving at a weary dog trot, with General Saez at the head. Only his own men remained to form a thin line along the barricade, and perhaps seventy-five troopers waited beside their sweating horses.

"You can go with them, if you like," said Carson harshly, jerking his head toward the retreating troops.

Russell flushed and spun around.

"That's quite unnecessary, Carson. I'll stay here with my own men."

"Suit yourself," the other man said carelessly. "I'll stay in any case. Don't get mad about it. Life's too short—for us!"

Then came the Federal attack. A swarm of soldiers in blue denim uniforms dashed out from street and alley and advanced upon the barricade at a run. The defenders immediately opened a hot fire, while at the same time a detachment of Federal troops that had gained the housetops along the western side of the Prado began to use their rifles. The air was filled with the zipping crash of bullets, and the sunset haze became rank with the stench of smokeless powder. A few of the men were using old-fashioned ammunition, and the white smoke hung motionless in the hot air.

A rifleman a few feet away from Russell suddenly dropped his piece and staggered back with the blood spurting from his throat. The advancing soldiers were dropping fast, but were still coming. Russell picked up the fallen man's rifle and rested it on the rampart, with a bag of onions for a support. From the odor he knew that the onions were rotten. Little things like that will intrude in the midst of the fiercest battle.

The attack was almost up to the defenses, and Russell, after firing twice, had drawn his saber for hand-to-hand fighting, when all at once the assault melted away like mist in the sun. One moment the Federals had been threatening the barricade itself, with another wave rushing forward to their support; the next moment the survivors were in full retreat, and the second detachment had caught the contagion and was falling back.

Russell thought of the cavalry, and spun on his heel, but Carson was already in the saddle and leading the horsemen out through the nearest gap in the barricade. With their revolvers spitting flame-tipped venom and their heavy machetes flashing in the sunset

glow, the riders charged down on the fleeing troops and trampled them into inglorious rout. Carson led them galloping the length of the Prado, and back through another of the gaps in the rampart. Two or three saddles were empty as the grinning men trotted back to Russell's position in the center of the line, but he grudgingly admitted that Carson had led them well.

The latter dismounted beside him. "One attack beaten, my bully!"

III

RELIGHTING the stump of a battered cigarette, Russell studied the older man covertly. Two days ago he would have classed Carson as merely a loud-mouthed braggart, but now he knew better. The man had a wealth of courage when needed, and was a born fighter. His irritating but positive personality set an inspired spark to the jaded troops, and they laughed and shouted as he strode along the lines with a grim, twisted smile on his blood-smeared countenance. He was as far as ever from looking what a typical soldier of fortune should be, but Russell admitted that he had fighting ability.

Still, the old antipathy remained. Carson the braggart had backed his words with deeds, but Carson the bully was unforgiven and unforgivable. If they survived, Russell would force an understanding.

If they survived! Even as the phrase ran through his mind, he realized the grim irony of it, the fact that it was their business to hold their position to the end. From that there could be no survival.

The sun had dropped below the level of the roofs, and long shadows

stretched across the Paseo del Prado, where the trampled grass in front of the barricade was dotted with sprawling bodies. The steady firing from the housetops over the way continued, and little tongues of yellow flame twinkled along the edge of the tiled roofs. The air was cooler, with a faint promise of a breeze. Along the Prado the street lights came on as if the rebellion had never begun.

Carson squatted on his heels and poked one finger into the soft ground.

"And so it ends," he said slowly, his harsh voice strangely gentle. "In a day or so the dead will be buried and forgotten, and the damage repaired. Some bullet marks on the walls—and nothing more. Everything will be as if this mad dream had never started."

"And liberty will have lost another fight," added Russell.

"Oh, yes—liberty," said Carson absently. "I had forgotten about that."

"Isn't that what you are fighting for?"

"Me? Lord, no! That's all right for young men like you. I'm in it for the money. There would have been good pay if we had won out in this affair."

"I don't see how there can be much loyalty in a case like that," said Russell.

The other snorted derisively.

"There are probably lots of things you can't see. I've fought for a dozen or more causes in my time, being unfitted for anything else, and I've been loyal to all of them. You're a conceited young ass, Russell! But look to your barricade—here comes another assault!"

Again the desultory rifle fire on both sides quickened to a steady drumming, again the line of dark-skinned soldiers in faded blue advanced at a

run. The sun was gone, but in the glare of the street lights grotesque shadows raced beside the charging men. Along the line of the barricade the snarling rifles flickered like summer lightning, but the charge reached the barrier in many places, and even penetrated through one of the gaps before it was beaten off. One young rebel started to run, but Carson shot him through the head, and the defense stiffened.

This time the Federals withdrew slowly and sullenly, firing as they went; and when the rebel horsemen attempted to ride them down, the charge was met by a snarling counter attack that sent them reeling back within the shelter of their defenses.

Carson laid aside his smoking rifle and began to bandage a raw crease where a bullet had scraped his shoulder. On his lips was a twisted smile that was more than a grimace.

"A close call that time, boy!" he said. "One more like that, and we're done for."

Russell pointed angrily to the body of the young rebel shot by Carson, where it lay sprawled at the foot of a palm tree.

"That was brutal and unnecessary," he said.

"Is that so?" Even in the dimness of the barricade's shadow he could see the black scowl that spread over Carson's face. "That shows how much you know about it. Our job is to stick here and protect the army's retreat. That's all we're living for just now—get that?—not to go into matters of ethics. If I'd let that man go, the others would have followed, and the barricade would have been lost. Besides—"

Carson stopped in the middle of a sentence and stood tense and listening.

From the eastern part of the city, where the defeated rebels were retreating into the darkness, and there should have been comparative quiet, came a sudden babel of sound—rifle shots, a confused shouting, the monotonous beat of a machine gun, and then the faint sound of a bugle.

The defenders of the barricade moved uneasily and talked among themselves. Russell pointed eastward, where a sudden flare had shot up into the sky.

"What is it?" he asked.

"It means they're cut off!" replied Carson. "The Federals must have intercepted their retreat. No use our staying here any longer now, so assemble your men!"

Russell called to a dirty peon with a battered bugle slung from his belt, and the man blew the recall. The cavalry mounted, and from the vantage of their saddles fired over the barricade, to cover the withdrawal, while panting riflemen ran in from both sides and formed an uneven column. They marched off at once, moving along the street at a shambling trot, while the mounted men walked their horses in the rear. The withdrawal was seen by the riflemen on the housetops over the way, and the tail of the column had scarcely disappeared up the street before Federal troops were tearing down the flimsy rampart and forming for the pursuit.

Russell and Carson trudged along together between the end of the column and the screen of horsemen. After a moment Timothy Burke dropped back and fell into step beside them. He had picked up an extra bandolier of cartridges somewhere, and was busy transferring the shells to his own crossed belts.

There was but little noise. The

weary rebels had dropped into a walk, though they still shuffled along at a good gait, and were saving their breath for other things than speech. Russell glanced at the men on either side of him, and wondered at the fate that brought the three of them together here among the last supporters of a newborn cause already lost. Don Miguel Urquiza's government of the republic of San Sebastian had been a cruel tyranny—or certain men had thought so; and the thought had blossomed into revolt. The revolution had been a fragile blossom, ill conceived and short-lived. Now its last pages were being written out by a few stubborn foreigners and a handful of weary peons.

Idly, as an almost incoherent thought filtered through the waves of physical weariness that were sweeping over him, Russell wondered if there was any chance of survival. With Federal troops ahead and behind their chances were very slender.

What varied careers were ending tonight in the muddy streets of San Sebastian! They were a queer trio, widely diverse, and yet, as they trudged wearily along with heads and shoulders sagging, they were almost indistinguishable under their coating of sweat and grime.

It was a grueling ordeal, that retreat—one long rear guard action the whole way. The Federal troops dogged their steps continually, firing irregular volleys that dropped man after man from the thinning ranks, scattering as the dwindling rebel horsemen charged them, only to reform and come on again ere the march was really resumed.

All the houses were prudently closed and shuttered, but from the roofs of many of them tiles and stones were

thrown down on the heads of the men below. At Russell's command they shot out the street lights as they went, and the narrow way was a cañon of blackness, with only the irregular, stabbing flare of the rifle shots for light. The darkness seemed to intensify the sense of hearing, and the scraping of many feet and harsh breathing of weary, panting men could be heard between the crash of the guns.

Russell wiped the sweat from his eyes and cautiously felt the hot barrel of his rifle. A slain rebel lay at his feet, and he stooped down and removed the man's crossed cartridge belts. Ammunition was getting low, and every shell counted. The street was like a figment from a dream—a dark inferno filled with moving shapes, with spirts of flame at the end, where the rifles of the rearmost snarled back at their pursuers. Federal troops were advancing up parallel streets on either side, in order to cut off the detachment from the main body.

For perhaps five hundred yards more the harassed rear guard fought its way forward, but then the pressure in front became so great that its progress was halted. Pushing his way forward, Russell found his men lying prone on the cobbles, or taking what shelter they could find in doorways, while the narrow street ahead was blocked by a mass of Federal troops cutting in from the side. Their bayonets gleamed in the flare of the rifles.

It was a tragedy, Russell felt, that these men who had fought so well all day should be cut off and hopeless; but his weary brain could produce no possible plan of escape. He turned to Carson.

"What do you think?"

"I think it's the end, boy—the final

curtain. Those men ahead are fresh, and ours are nearly done."

Russell hesitated for a moment, and then sent a runner to the rear of his little column to summon what was left of his cavalry. It was a last desperate hope. The two score riders walked their mounts through the broken ranks of the weary riflemen, drew their machetes, and charged down on the Federals blocking the retreat, while Russell gathered together his riflemen and followed close on their heels. Carson had gone with the cavalry.

The newcomers were Urquiza's best infantry, men built of sterner stuff than the inferior regiments dogging the rear. Instead of scattering when the rebel horsemen charged, they opened up in an ominous quiet and then closed in behind them. They swallowed the little troop of cavalry as a quicksand swallows an unwary traveler. Russell, storming behind them at the head of his exhausted riflemen, found himself unable to get through to their assistance.

Man after man was shot from his saddle or pulled down and bayoneted. A swirl in the dim seen ranks showed where one or two held out for a few moments. Then even that ceased, and the surviving rebels reeled back from the silent, irresistible drive of the regular troops.

Each of the final stages in the fight came swift on the heels of the one before. Russell, crouched in a doorway, was still jamming cartridges into the magazine of his rifle when shouts from the rear sent him running back to that end of the column. The soldiers who had trailed him were withdrawing, and for a single instant a wild, improbable hope sprang up within him. Then he saw the reason—the infantry were moving aside to clear the path for cav-

ally that was wheeling into the street behind. The faint light of the rising moon twinkled on the points of their long lances.

Burke, who had walked over to Russell's side, swore softly.

"It's the lancers—Don Miguel's little pets," he said. "God help us now!"

The rebels opened a scattering fire, and the cavalry quickened its pace. The long lances of the front rank troopers swung downward, and the horses increased their gait from a trot to a gallop. The rebel rifle fire snarled and crackled and brought a number crashing down, perhaps a dozen in all, but men behind filled their places and the charge continued.

Like a resistless tide the horsemen swept onward, and they were moving at a tearing gallop when they struck the rebel ranks. Rifle and pistol cracked out at point-blank range. Lance points jarred on gun barrels or fleshed themselves in dimly seen shapes that collapsed under the impact. The long sabers of the troopers following up the front ranks flashed like pale ribbons of silver. The horsemen rode clear over the weary remnants of the rebel rear guard, rode them down and trampled them into the bloody mud of the street, smashed all last semblance of resistance by weight of bone and muscle and steel.

When the riders had passed, the revolt had ended forever.

IV

RUSSELL, standing with his feet wide apart, had flung his rifle to his shoulder when the lancers rode down on his men. He fired and missed, fired again and knocked a trooper clean out of his saddle, and then found his magazine empty. Hurling the useless weapon from him, he snatched out his

revolver just as the charge went home.

He could never completely remember the mad swirl of events that followed immediately thereafter. Even years later it was still a confused recollection of plunging hoofs and stabbing lances, of horsemen looming up like giants in the night, of rifles lashing out like striking serpents, of a dark street that became an infernal cañon of chaos and death.

A trooper rode him down, and he ran for the shelter of a doorway, then wheeled and fired his revolver in the other's face. The rider swayed and fell from the saddle. Russell grasped the pommel, and in a bound was astride the leather and laying about him with his clubbed revolver.

A face appeared at his elbow—a flushed, red-whiskered countenance with a smear of redder blood across the cheek—the face of Timothy Burke. Russell kicked loose a stirrup, and Burke swung up behind him. Then he wheeled the horse and rode straight for the narrow entrance of an alley at the left.

Perhaps their departure was unnoticed, or perhaps such troopers as followed them lost the trail in the maze of narrow and unlit alleys through which the fugitives rode. In any event, they found themselves alone and unmolested when Russell finally drew rein in a quiet plaza far across the city. He took his feet from the stirrups and stretched his legs, while the nearly winded horse stood breathing in great straining gasps.

"And now what?" he questioned.

"'Now what' is right!" Burke's voice was whimsical as he too relaxed. "We can't be after staying in the streets. Northerners are too scarce here, and we'd be picked up as soon as it gets light." He paused, looking

around, then slapped his thigh in sudden jubilation. "By the saints, I've an idea! I know where we are now—this is the Plaza Nueva. There's an old woman lives a few blocks away from here who'd probably hide us. I'm sure she would. Let's go!"

They crossed the plaza and moved slowly down the inky blackness of a narrow and unlit alley. Burke dismounted, cursing as he stumbled through the accumulated filth that paved the street, and felt his way along the wall till he reached the narrow door. A panel opened, and he engaged in whispered conversation with some one inside. Then the door opened in turn, and the fugitives led their horse into a small courtyard that smelled of the filth of ages.

It was a tiny old woman who led them into the dimly lit interior of the house—a diminutive figure less than five feet tall and shriveled like a dried apple. Her black eyes were bright and quick moving, and she favored them with a toothless but friendly grin.

"Meet Tia Linda," said Burke, with a wave of his hand. "She says she'll hide us till to-morrow. The horse can stay in the *patio*."

"What is this place?"

"Tia Linda's house. Don't ask me what she does—I've no idea, but it's probably something crooked. I think she'll play square with us. She says there's another of our gang in the back room. Let's go see who it is."

Through a low doorway they passed into a small room lit by a single candle. A man leaped to his feet as they entered, then laughed shortly, and again relaxed on the bed against the wall. It was Carson.

All Russell's weariness and discouragement seemed to crystallize at the sight of Carson's sardonic grin.

"How did you get here?" he snarled.

"On a stolen horse, of course. I managed to get through when they trapped our cavalry." Carson's voice showed his surprise at Russell's tone. "What's the matter, youngster? You sound as if you were sorry I got away."

With an effort Russell mastered his dislike and mumbled some reply. Then he eased his weary body down on the floor in the corner and almost instantly fell asleep. Of course, when so many good men had died, Carson the bully would survive!

Hours passed, drowsy hours half asleep and half awake. Night and day were alike in that windowless room, and battle-wearied minds and bodies were content to lie dormant in the warmth and quiet. At last Tia Linda slipped in, and after a short conversation with her, Burke shook his companions into wakefulness.

"Let's travel, boys! Auntie says the patrols are off the streets now. We'd better drift."

Yawning and stretching his stiffened muscles, Russell climbed to his feet.

"What time is it?" he inquired.

"She says it's about ten o'clock at night—the next night. We slept nearly all day. Come on!"

They had only two horses, and as Carson was the heaviest man of the three, they mounted him alone on the smaller horse. Tia Linda opened the gate that led from her tiny *patio* to the street, and peered out for a moment. Then she hissed reassuringly, and they filed out into the deserted alley.

After the inaction of the past twenty-four hours, and the cramped quarters where they had lain hidden, it was a relief to be on the move again. Black and silent streets that grew

more and more poorly paved, and finally changed to dirt, flowed by under their feet. Rows of houses that grew squalid, turned to shacks, and finally petered out entirely, went by on either hand. At last there was the open, starlit sky above them, and only grass land and palmettos around.

Burke broke the silence.

"We'd better ride by night and try to hide out by day. There are probably detachments of cavalry roaming around, and we're lost if they sight us."

They rode like phantoms in a dream, noiseless and unreal. The *marcha* of their horses was so smooth a gait that in the blackness they had the illusion of not moving at all. The palmettos seemed to approach with a stealthy motion and glide by of their own volition.

Burke, who was riding behind Russell, was dozing with his head on his companion's shoulder. The younger man's mind was alert and active, now weighing their chances of escape, now running over the events that had led up to the present situation. At times he felt a sudden desire to laugh. There was a certain sardonic humor in the fact that they were probably the only three men of the insurgents' rear guard who had so far survived. He seemed fated to be thrown into the company of Carson, the one man among his recent companions whom he actively disliked and cordially hated. However, that could wait. They must stick together in the attempt to reach safety on the coast.

V

At dawn the three men were fortunate to discover a small cave halfway up a rocky cliff. Their horses were tethered in a convenient clump of bushes below, and—barring accidents

—there was little chance of discovery. Carson sat close by the cave mouth, his somber eyes staring out into the distance, while the other two stretched out on the floor of the little cavern behind him. They dozed at intervals throughout the long day.

It was late in the afternoon when Russell awoke from one such nap to find Carson gone. He yawned and sat up, wondering where their surly companion could be. Perhaps the fellow had slipped down below to look at the horses.

Russell walked casually to the cave mouth, then dropped flat and peered cautiously over the edge.

A full troop of Federal cavalry were sitting their horses on the plain directly below the cave. The late afternoon sunlight twinkled on their brass helmets and on the points of their lances. In the front was Carson, talking with two mounted officers, apparently on friendly terms.

"The dirty, treacherous rat!" whispered Burke, softly but with anger.

Russell nodded agreement.

"Giving us away to save his own skin! Well, let 'em come! It won't be easy to get us."

"Not while the ammunition holds out; but we haven't much."

"I thought it was funny Carson didn't sleep as we did. He's been watching for them all day."

The two fugitives lay inside the cave mouth with their weapons ready. The troopers below dismounted and picketed their horses, while Carson disappeared from sight around the shoulder of the hill, with half a dozen Federals at his heels. The main body seemed in no great hurry to attack. Perhaps they were waiting for the cover of darkness.

"Hell!" said Burke sadly. "I never

would have thought Carson would sell us out this way!"

"I'm not surprised." Russell was more bitter. "I never did like the man. He's a bully and a braggart."

The Irishman shook his head.

"Never judge by things like that, lad. Carson's tough, but I've always thought him square."

Darkness came, and with it a bustle of activity below. The men in the cave could see nothing, but they sensed a movement of men and horses. Then came a sudden crashing volley, and they made ready for the attack to which it must be a prelude. They moved a little way back into the cave, where any one climbing up into the entrance would be silhouetted against the stars, and waited.

The minutes dragged on as he waited for the end, but nothing happened. The pair of fugitives had no way of judging time, and it seemed like hours that they lay there in motionless silence. At last Burke stood up uneasily.

"Wonder what's delaying them!" he said.

"God knows," returned Russell.

Later, a long time later, the moon rose and flooded the plains with a silvery radiance. As the light grew stronger, everything below was revealed to the watchers in the cave, but they saw no trace of the cavalry. Men and horses had ridden away.

Wonderingly they climbed down the face of the cliff. Strangest of all, they found their two horses still concealed in the thick underbrush at the foot of the rock.

Suspicious of their good fortune, scarcely able to believe that escape to the coast looked probable once again, they mounted and turned north. The tracks showed that the cavalry had ridden away to the east.

The two men rode around the first shoulder of the hill, and then abruptly reined in. Just before them lay a new-made grave with a few stones piled on top. There was neither cross nor headstone, but a machete was thrust into the ground beside the mound of earth, with a battered hat on top, and both were recognizable as having belonged to Carson. They uncovered in silence.

"We were wrong," said Burke slowly, after a long pause. "We were as wrong as hell. Carson watched while we slept, and he must have seen the cavalry coming. He thought they would find our horses, so he went down, let them catch him, and made them think he was alone. He threw them off our track. The volley we heard was when they shot him."

"And to think how I hated him!" said Russell with bitter self-reproach.

Burke shrugged.

"No use feeling that way, lad. It's too late to mend now. We all misjudge people at times, and often there's no way of telling them about it. At least Carson did what he tried to do, for the cavalry tracks turn east, and the road to the coast lies open. Trek on!"

For a moment Russell dismounted. With a stub of a pencil he wrote an inscription on a cardboard box cover that still remained in his saddlebag. When the men rode on, a square of cardboard had been laid on the grave and weighted with the machete, and the rays of the strengthening moon shone on a penciled inscription. Russell had made the only apology he could.

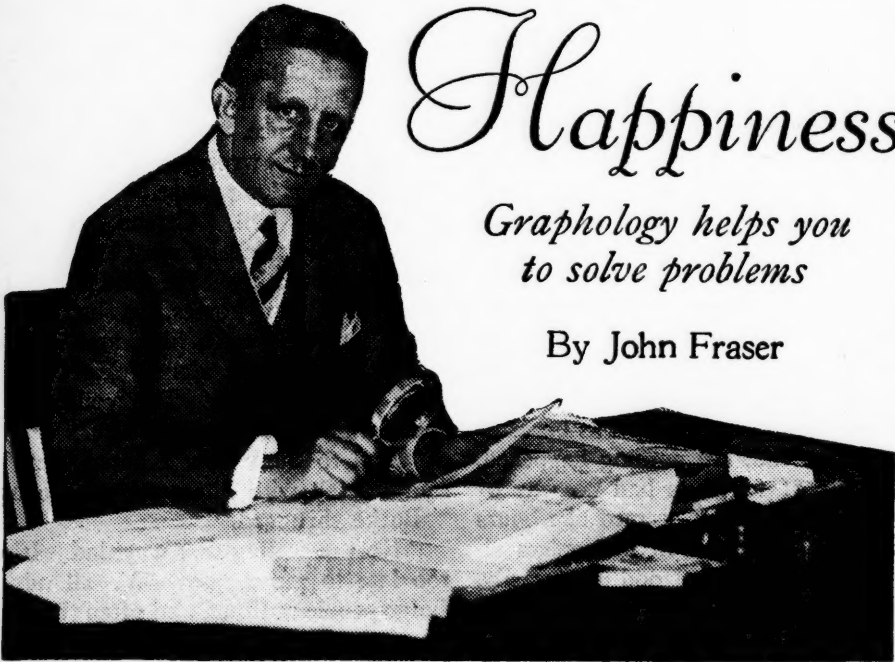
Carson's epitaph read:

HERE LIES A VERY GALLANT
GENTLEMAN

Handwriting and Happiness

*Graphology helps you
to solve problems*

By John Fraser



HAVE been asked to conduct a department of vocational and matrimonial guidance, based upon the science of graphology, for the readers of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE—a service which will be continued in the new *All-Story*, with which MUNSEY'S will be merged, beginning with the next issue.

Graphology is so widely recognized as a guide in character analysis that it is hardly necessary for me to point out just how your pen strokes indicate your inner life. You yourself have noticed, for instance, that when you are full of pep you write differently

than when you are sick or tired or very much discouraged.

There are many other things which a study of penmanship reveals, but, like every other science, graphology has its limitations: it cannot disclose your past or forecast your future.

The particular phase with which I am dealing here is an interpretation of handwriting as applied to two of life's most important problems—your sweetheart and your job.

If you wish to know whether your sweetheart is the right person for you to marry, send specimens of both writings to me at 280 Broadway, New York City, in care of *All-Story* maga-

zine. Address your letter "Service for Sweethearts." Graphology cannot, of course, give you the final word on matrimonial compatability, but it has helped many to reach a decision.

Or if you desire advice in discovering the trade or profession for which you are best suited, insofar as graphology can point out the way, send your handwriting to the same address, but label the envelope "Your Career."

There is no charge for either service, provided you use the coupon printed here. You may take advantage of one service or both, as you prefer, but you must use a separate coupon for each service. Write in ink. As many answers will be printed on these pages as space permits. All other questions will be answered by mail. Don't forget to inclose a self-addressed stamped envelope.

time of the day to have

FLORENCE E., Baltimore, Md.

and the other night

WESLEY

The two handwritings which you sent me, Florence—your own and your sweetheart's—are a splendid study in contrasts. In your case I see a rather tender-hearted, feminine nature which is sensitive to a degree, while your friend's has the qualities which go to make up a harum-scarum, materialistic disposition.

Whether you are "going to pull together, or scrap all the time when you are married"—as you put it—is entirely up to yourselves. It all depends on your willingness to keep two bears in the house—bear and forbear. Since you are the antithesis of each other, I would recommend that both of you

cultivate tact, otherwise there's sure to be trouble.

My reason for these warnings is that Wesley's nature has lots of insistence in it. That means he likes to have his own way. What he says goes. When at home he will be monarch of all he surveys. In a word, he is a "he-man," and being such you will have to recognize his leadership. You, on the other hand, will have to outgrow your impatience. Self-control is insufficiently developed in your make-up. A quick, fiery temper is never far from the surface. Extravagance in the spending of money is also something you'll have to watch when you are Wesley's wife. Don't be so matter of fact, nor opinionative.

That you are capable of managing a household goes without saying. You have all the attributes of a sensible, loving companion who is qualified to make a man comfortable and happy, but both of you should cultivate much more forbearance than you have shown in the past.

My hands interested in the subject

DORIS N., Chicago

at that startling revolution

GORDON

Your letter, Doris, was straightforward and to the point. It showed me that you were grappling with a problem that required consummate wisdom on your part to settle one way or another. I'm delighted to have this opportunity of helping you, even if it be only to give the merest suggestion as to your plan of procedure. I should say that Gordon is an impulsive, headstrong young fellow, full of *la joie de vivre*, and at times a little too demon-

strative; also foolish with his money. I gather all this from the extreme slope of his penmanship.

Much as you love this boy, and feel that "he is the only one on earth" for you, as you say, there are more reasons than you give in your letter why I would advise you to Stop, Look, and Consider before you say Yea or Nay to him on Thanksgiving Eve, as he expects you to do. Though Love is blind, you should not have to call in the old eye doctor—Marriage—to adjust your vision, when a little common sense will do the trick.

Gordon has very little in common with you, in nature or disposition. He would never see your point of view after marriage. He likes authority far too much for that. You, on the other hand, belong to the class of girls who do not wear their hearts on their sleeves. Reserve and self-restraint play a large part in your make-up. It is true that romance and jollity appeal to you strongly, but not to the extent of throwing your womanhood at any man's head.

No, Doris, Gordon and you could never be happy, so don't fool yourself any longer. Don't despair, the right man will come along when you least expect it.

waiting to have

ELSIE D., Madison, Wis.

With an ambitious nature such as yours, Elsie, I see no reason why you should not climb to the top of any vocation you choose. As you say, you "have the goods, but can't find a market." Well, Elsie, you don't need to worry very much about the market. I don't think you have even put the

goods up for sale. Your splendid education, coupled with your buoyancy and optimism, fit you for leadership. You were born to command. Your whole bearing demands attention. Your voice undoubtedly has a ring of sincerity.

All this leads me to say that the sooner you get into business for yourself the better. A girl like you would succeed almost immediately with a beauty parlor. Your suavity and graciousness of manner would win many customers and friends.

You are chatty and approachable. Also waggish and full of fun. You have a fine business head. You are discreet and discriminating. Your knowledge of men and things, even at your age, is remarkable.

What more do you require to get to the highest rung in your ladder of success? Why, nothing! I observe, however, that your will power is something to be reckoned with, and your temper not much to brag about. The latter, of course, is an earmark of femininity, and can be turned into a stepping stone if rightly applied. My advice is, don't hesitate to go into this business. You are simply cut out for it.

that he can think

SUSAN Y., Topeka, Kan.

It is quite obvious to me that you are of a studious disposition, Susan. Books are your companions, and research is your favorite occupation. Since you show pedagogical tendencies in your penmanship, I would not hesitate to advise you to make teaching your profession. By the formation of your pen strokes I notice that you are precise in everything you undertake.

You are of a quiet disposition, and, though inclined to be impatient at times, you have enough self-control to be patient with those who are earnestly doing their best. This is a fundamental asset to any one who seeks for success in the tutoring of children. I notice your memory serves you well. Your good-natured, candid manner is bound to win you friends. Your willingness to spend and be spent in the service of others, bespeaks for you a popularity which money could never buy.

There may be danger, however, of you becoming set in your ideas. I see evidences of opinionativeness. It may be all right to be the schoolmarm in business hours, but be careful not to have your profession written all over you when you're in company with grown-ups, otherwise you may be labeled "pedantic." Start to-day by bending all your efforts toward this goal. Judging from your thoroughness and honesty of purpose, many a school or college in your own State,

Kansas, would be glad to have your services.

Use This Coupon

John A. Fraser

ALL-STORY MAGAZINE
280 Broadway,
New York City.

I inclose specimen (or specimens) of handwriting and self-addressed stamped envelope. Please give me an analysis, without charge, for the service I have checked.

—Service for Sweethearts

—Your Career

Name.....

Street.....

City.....State.....



THE ROSE-LINED STREET

I KNOW a street where roses sweet
Hang o'er the fence on either side—
A wondrous screen of leaf and bloom,
Behind which sunny gardens hide.

There, wreathed about with tangled vines,
Old-fashioned houses meet the eye;
From one a girlish face looks out
And smiles on me as I go by.

Rich purple blossoms hang their heads
Across the old gray walls of stone;
I hear a banjo's sweet refrain,
And hum the words in undertone.

Each day I wander down this way,
For heart, as well as loitering feet,
Has found the gate among the vines
That shuts Her garden from the street.

Adella Washer.



"I've got something to tell you, and I ain't going to tell you but once . . . I want you to lay off Queenie"

Coney Island

When tragedy falls athwart love and his dreams are shattered, Chic Cotton sees the unscrupulous amusement-park builder in a new rôle

By Homer Croy

Author of "West of the Water Tower," "They Had to See Paris," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT



CHIC COTTON'S mental outlook was broadened immeasurably, and his backbone was strengthened as the result of leaving his home town in the Mid-west to conquer the great city of New York.

Chic was an unsophisticated, girly inventor of twenty-two. Three years before, while still living at Junction City, he had developed a case of "puppy love" for Charmian De Ford.

A girlhood friend of his mother's had brought her to Junction City for a brief visit. Chic had found her charming, cultured and spiritually beautiful. He and Charmian had formed an idealistic friendship, which had gradually petered out into hazy memories after the girl's return to her home at Floral Gardens, Long Island.

Now that Chic was living in New York, he found employment in a radio factory and renewed the friendship. Then came a minor tragedy. Chic ac-



identally bumped into and shattered a miniature Swiss chalet, delicately built of ice as a surprise in honor of Mr. De Ford's election as president of a golf club.

Humiliated, he left Charmian early that evening, returning to his boarding house, where a class in æsthetic dancing was holding forth on the first floor. The door was ajar, and Chic peeped at the rhythmic flashing of twenty bare legs, later becoming acquainted with one of the dancers—Queenie Johnson, a tight-rope walker known as "Coney Island's Sweetheart."

Chic had invented an amusement park device which he hoped would make him wealthy—a Giant Top, with little cars shuttling in and out. With the aid of Queenie he induced Joel Zimmerman, "King of Coney Island," to build it, his mother advancing four thousand dollars capital.

Meanwhile Chic still visited Charmian, who had become a successful radio singer, but more and more he grew infatuated with the "wire walker." One evening, however, he was swept off his feet by Charmian's love-

liness, poise, and refinement, which contrasted sharply with Queenie's too vivid personality. He asked her to marry him; she agreed. Later Queenie proposed marriage to Chic and he tacitly accepted.

With two *fiancées*, Chic's affections veered from one to the other, but finally concentrated on Queenie. He jilted Charmian, and she sailed abroad.

In courting Queenie he roused the antagonism of Zimmerman, who was building his top under contract at a plant just outside of New York City. Zimmerman was the most powerful figure in Coney Island, and had the reputation of getting what he wanted.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE KING OF CONEY ISLAND



CHIC'S nervousness passed away. It was really a great honor to have Zimmerman send for one. Chic knew that Zimmerman could, if he wished, go ahead and complete the top

according to the plans and specifica-

tions without showing it to Chic. But instead of that Zimmerman was sending for him.

After all, Zimmerman was a square shooter; he was cruel, he was relentless, but no one ever accused the iron showman of being petty and underhanded—a quality none too conspicuous in the world that he moved in.

There was another surprise for Chic. When he called up to tell Queenie about it, a queer silence came over her.

"When did he send you that word?" she asked.

"To-day."

"How did you get it?"

"Abie Katz telephoned me."

"He wants you to come out to the plant, alone?"

"He didn't say that. He just said to drop out to the plant, there was something he wanted to see me about, that was all."

"He didn't say nothing more?"

"No."

Queenie thought a moment.

"Listen, kid, I want to go with you."

She hadn't seen the top in a long time, she said. Besides, it would be nice to go with him.

It would be all right to take Queenie along, Chic told himself. What possible objection could there be? Zimmerman knew he was going with her; hadn't he seen her with him a lot of times? Of course he had.

Besides, what business was it of Zimmerman's if he intended to marry Queenie? None at all.

Chic met Queenie at the station, they got on the train and started for "the plant." It was one of those lovely, perfect days which come every now and then toward the end of February.

At the country depot, where they

got off, Chic and Queenie took a taxi. The cement road lay like a black ribbon in a universal white. Along the road rivulets of water softly nosed their way, while every roof sang a little song—*drip-drip-drip-p*.

In the distance Chic could see the plant. It was a large half brick and half stucco ramshackle, sprawling building with a towering iron smokestack held in place by guy wires anchored to the ground. A thick cloud of smoke welled up and floated off, growing thinner and thinner until lo, it was nothing at all.

Even at this distance the factory reflected the rough, careless confusion of Zimmerman's office in the Dragon's Gorge.

Suddenly Chic's heart gave an ecstatic leap, for, extending above the line of the room, like a dome, he could see the spidery outline of the top. His top! The top that his brain had conceived!

And now, even as he looked, a derick almost as thin and spidery as the outlines of the top, lifted up and held aloft what looked to be a toothpick; it dangled a moment and then slowly began to lower the steel splinter into place.

"Oh, isn't it lovely?" he cried as he felt an elation within him. And once, back in Junction City, the Giant Top had been only a sketch on the back of an envelope! Suddenly he felt a glowing inside—how wonderful life was, what a splendid world it was!

But for conservative, partly Puritan Chic that was a great lapse in dignity—to sing out: "Oh, isn't it lovely?" Girl talk. Mustn't be silly. Always be dignified.

"He's getting along fine with it," Chic finished prosaically.

But however much he might try to

disguise and repress them, Queenie suspected the emotions that were tumbling his heart, for she threw her arms about his neck and kissed him.

"I think you're wonderful!" she said.

Chic felt a moment's uneasiness at what the taxi driver, who seemed practically to be sitting in their laps, might think, but Queenie had no such hesitation. The taxi driver could jump in the river—her favorite spot for disposing of people. She had wanted to kiss Chic, and she had done so. That was all there was to it.

"You're going to be a great man, kid; I feel it in my bones," she declared.

Chic took her hand, he held it shyly, without replying.

Directly in front of the main door of the factory was Zimmerman's sleek, brightly-painted roadster. On the radiator cap floated a pennant which said "Coney Island." But now there was no breeze, and the flag lay drooped about its standard.

A tiny thought went flitting through Queenie's mind, causing her a moment's uneasiness. It was that she had often been in that car, but now that was all over. She had made Zimmerman understand that, in spite of the many things he had done for her. But still Zimmerman was so, well—queer.

Now, to-day, since she had come here with Chic, he would know definitely there was no hope for him. It was much better, she reasoned, that he should see her and Chic together and get it settled once and for all, than for Zimmerman to drag along, believing that everything would be as he wished.

Chic had the impression, as they stepped inside the plant, of being in the midst and stir of life. The decrepit old building wasn't much to look

at from the outside, but inside it was alive and humming. Men were coming and going, there was the whine of lathes, and the steady thunderous thumping of a steel hammer. Behind and guiding all this activity was a personality, a driving genius, who was more interested in getting results than in outside appearances.

There were other factories engaged in the manufacture of amusement enterprises which were, at this moment, languishing, but Zimmerman's plant was going full tilt.

Spring would soon be here, the amusement parks all over the country and in Canada would be opening, and the merry-go-rounds, the roller coasters, the circle swings, the chairplanes, the Skooters, the Dodgems, the Frolics, the Old Mills, the Merry Mix-ups, the Fun Houses, the Over-the-Jumps, the Jack-and-Jills must be put into shape.

The great task of entertaining and bringing pleasure and recreation to millions of workaday people must be got under way again.

Chic delayed at the door. Should he go right in, or knock? It was a factory office, not a home; people came and went all the time. Once or twice before, when the top had first been started, he had been there and had walked unceremoniously in. But now he hesitated.

"I expect we had better knock," he said.

There was the sound of a thick, muffled voice inside. "Come," it said, and then Chic opened the door.

Chic had expected to see Zimmerman as he had seen him before—working with his blue prints and architects' drawings, or possibly he would have his coat off, with his smudged apron tied around his waist, while he carried out a design in *papier-mâché*.

There Zimmerman would stand at the mixing bowl, his sleeves rolled up over his hairy arms, with a drawing of a grotesque face pinned on the sketch board, while with astonishingly quick movements of his powerful hands he molded the likeness. After it had taken shape, he would walk over to the faucet, hold his hands under the water, dry them and then take up his color box and paint brushes and add the clown touches.

During these moments Zimmerman was at his happiest and his most care-free, for at bottom he was a creative artist, although forced to work in the medium of extravagant and absurd faces and dragons and giants — "kid stuff," he sometimes called it—and in rides and concessions.

While he was creating, he would hum to himself, sometimes even whistle. But when he finished and had turned the masque or figure over to his workmen to enlarge and construct, he would put on his coat, go back to his desk, and then again would become the silent, taciturn, cold promoter and park builder.

But now, as Chic hesitatingly opened the door, Zimmerman was sitting at his desk, bending over a sheaf of typewritten sheets.

He stared a moment at Queenie in surprise.

"Oh!" he said, and then rose from his desk and half pulled off his fur cap in a gesture of respect.

"Hello, Queenie," he finished more agreeably. "Quite a little surprise."

He turned to Chic.

"Set down," he said briefly.

His hand made a slight movement toward a chair. And now, as Chic and Queenie seated themselves, his slow, unwavering glance swung back to Chic.

"I been expecting you. You two come together?"

Almost unconsciously Chic glanced at Queenie.

"Yes, sir," said Chic.

"In a taxi?"

"Yes, sir. That's right," he tried to add more lightly. "Wonderful day, isn't it? As we came along we noticed how many old people were sitting on their porches and balconies."

Zimmerman looked at him penetratingly a moment.

"Must of been very interesting," he said.

"Yes, it was," Chic heard himself answer. It was a nice drive out, too. Well, it wouldn't be long now till spring. Then the amusement parks would have to think about opening. Ought to be a big year, this year. Specially if they had a hot summer.

Zimmerman sat at his desk, his arms folded across the typewritten pages, silently studying Chic. At last he made a slight gesture toward a door which led to the inner regions of the plant, and from which came the dull, heavy thumpings.

"I sent for you because I got something to show you," he said. "Come on."

He arose, his cap still on his head, and led the way. The door opened. The thumping grew louder.

CHAPTER XXXIV

TWO MEN AND ONE GIRL



IF Chic had thought Zimmerman was in a bad mood, he was mistaken. Instead, he was in a very mellow mood. And now, as Zimmerman guided them through the factory, Chic realized this.

The longing for creation, which was

so deep in Zimmerman, was being fulfilled. Before them was the Giant Top, two-thirds completed. He had taken a rather vague idea that some one had brought him, he had worked over it, redrawn it, redesigned it, and then had started it through the process of construction in his factory. And now that dream, that titivating idea was a reality!

He waved his hand with an air of carelessness.

"There she is. Not so bad, huh?"

A whistle blew, the great derrick began to lower a steel crossbeam into place, slowly, inch by inch, as if it were alive; *clunk*, the beam went contentedly, and then two or three steel-workers in overalls descended upon it; great wrenches turned; now a workman started to walk across it as calmly and unconcernedly as if he were treading the pavement itself.

Zimmerman's hand made a gesture at the towering steel skeleton and the midget workmen.

"Pretty sight, ain't it?"

At these simple words, Chic's emotions welled up in him.

"Yes, it is, Mr. Zimmerman, it sure is. It might never have been built if it hadn't been for you, Mr. Zimmerman."

Zimmerman gave his hand a careless flick again as if these precious words were nothing at all.

"Oh, I guess it would, Cotton. Most things in this world that are any good always get themselves done, I've noticed that."

Unexpectedly his hand went out and rested a moment on Chic's shoulder.

"I kind of sized you up from the first as a winner," he said, and Chic's heart suddenly seemed too small. That exquisite moment when Zimmerman's hand lay on his shoulder! Such praise!

"Have a cigar, Cotton."

Zimmerman's hand went to his pocket and came out with the black, deadly looking torpedo that he smoked and he handed it to Chic with one of the few gestures of friendship that he knew.

"Here, I got a light."

From his pocket Zimmerman took an elaborate gold lighter, drew his thumb across it and then held it for Chic, meanwhile becoming loquacious.

"That's something new. The Hawaiian Show took up a collection and gave it to me the other day. Half Pint did. You know how he got to kinda acting up last summer, bellyaching around about something or other like them performers get to doing sometimes, and I had to kick his pants for him. He raised a terrible yowl, but now he thinks he wasn't treated so bad, and he comes across with this here."

Zimmerman's eyes brightened, he gave an animal grunt of satisfaction.

"I don't think I'm going to hear from him again—why? The damned little squirt 'd die for me now, I guess."

The lighter clicked shut, he dropped it into his pocket.

"That's the way you got to handle show people; don't take none of their lip."

His own lips tightened, the peculiar thick swelling characteristic of him came into his jaws.

"I knew I was right. I'd kill the damn fool before I'd give in to him an inch. I don't put things over on nobody, and they better not try it on me."

As they continued through the plant, Chic suddenly felt a wave of respect for Zimmerman. He had built up all this himself; he constructed de-

vices not only for himself but for other amusement firms. "American amusement devices" had become famous all over the world; many of them had come from this factory. And Zimmerman was the one who had built the factory, it was he who made these wheels turn, who kept the stamping machine going.

Chic paused a moment in the shipping department; a spur of a railroad had been laid through the yard, and now a car was backed up close to the building itself. Men in overalls were busily loading long crates, while one man with an arm board in his hand, to which were clipped bills of lading, was busily checking off the shipment. As Chic looked at the crates he saw the address painted on them—"Johannesburg, South Africa."

Zimmerman paused proudly.

"See where they're going? That fellow down there—Schmidt—he thinks I'm a great fella. Writes and asks me questions ever' now and then about parks or rides or something, and I answer him. Then what you think? The other day he writes in and asks me for a signed autographed picture of myself to hang on his wall. Think of that!—with the frozen pan I got for a face." Turning to Queenie he gave an appealing little laugh. "Of course, some people think it ain't so bad when they get used to it."

But Queenie said nothing.

"Looky here," Zimmerman said suddenly. "Here is my painting and decorating, and atmosphere department."

Chic saw before him a large, studio-looking room with *papier-mâché* casts of huge faces and great staring eyes and grotesque griffons and dragons which two or three men, standing on ladders, were solemnly painting.

"It's funny about the monkeys," continued Zimmerman, in his harsh, iron voice, from which all sentiment was now erased.

"They like human faces best of all. Grinning faces, that's what they like. I never stick a sour face up in my park unless it's in a hand-holder or in a dark ride. People come to parks to forget their troubles and to get away from themselves, so it's up to us to give 'em something cheerful. When you make a face, have all the lines *up* instead of *down*. Remember that, Cotton, if you break into the park game. Send 'em away laughing—write that on your cuff. Let 'em come in solemn, but send 'em out laughing. Do that and you won't ever die in the poorhouse. God! The possibilities in the outdoor park game in America ain't scratched. What we need is somebody with the brains of a Henry Ford to see it and put it over. Don't you think so, Queenie?"

It was an emotional speech for Zimmerman; it had plumbed the depths of him, and now he appealed to Queenie.

But Queenie wasn't interested. The thing that was now vital to her was Chic's top. Chic himself. Their engagement. The home they would establish.

Every so often she had heard Zimmerman say, when he was greatly stirred, just such things about "the park game"; she had answered them eagerly and personally, then—but now that was all over. Chic—what Chic was going to do—that was the big thing.

"I guess you're right, Mr. Zimmerman," she answered inconsequentially. "Looks like it, don't it?"

They had seen the top, the excursion was over, they returned to the office. Zimmerman's mellow mood continued,

although now and then his eyes dwelt on Queenie with a yearning, poignant look.

Queenie took it all casually. She had inspected the plant many times before; it meant nothing to her that the plant was going full blast, when others languished; that great crates and boxes were being sent out all over the world—the boss was just having one of his talkative spells.

Zimmerman leaned back in his swivel chair at his desk, his foot propped on one of the drawers.

"Looky here; what do you think of this? It's my speech."

From the desk he gathered up the sheaf of papers and held them in his hand. "It's the speech I'm going to make at the National Association of Amusement Parks convention.

"Say, it seems funny, me making a speech, don't it? But the boys they been wanting me to for some time, so I been writing it on the back of envelopes and so on when the ideas came to me. Here are some of them."

Abruptly his voice lowered; a pleading note came into it.

"This is the title I took for my speech: 'How Shall We Treat the Public—as Brothers or Boobs?'—you see how they begin with the same letters—Greenberg said she liked it fine. She fixed up some of the language for me an' untangled the grammar. I'm going to get it all learned by heart so that I can say it off, big words and everything."

Zimmerman paused. In his eagerness and earnestness he had slid forward in his chair, his head was hunched down between his shoulders; and now his thick, blunt fingers of one hand rose and fell on the desk as if it were a piano.

"I don't mind telling you," he said,

his voice suddenly filled with emotion, "if I get this speech off in good shape that I may be elected president of the N. A. A. P. I'd like that. I ain't ever been president of anything, except my own businesses."

He paused almost dreamily a moment.

"I don't know why I make so many enemies; a lot of 'em 'd tear my gizzard out if they could. One thing they fight me so on is what I say in my speech here—it's absolutely treating the public fair and giving 'em a square deal. That's the way the park business is got to be run."

Zimmerman's eyes brightened; a lighter mood came over him.

"Listen, I got something kinda good in my speech. It's about P. T. Barnum. Say, there was a showman for you! Had something up here," and his blunt finger touched the rim of his cap.

"I think that if Mr. Barnum was living to-day he wouldn't be in the circus business. He'd be running a big park like it ought to be run. Looky what we do at Coney—lots of days we have a million people. I don't mean Fourth of July alone, but hot Sundays in August. Labor Day, too. That's more than a circus 'll handle all summer. Well, I got it in my speech, something about Mr. Barnum that I think 'll make 'em laugh. Here it is right here, I got it marked on the edge with a cross, see, like this—"

This was the anecdote. In the early days of his career, when P. T. Barnum had his American Museum on lower Broadway, New York, he was much troubled by country people coming and staying too long in his palace of wonders. They would bring their lunch baskets and remain all day. Barnum noticed this. He must devise a way

not only to get them in, but also to get them out.

At last he hit upon an idea. He had signs and arrows painted and distributed about the museum. One painted hand said, "To the Lioness." Near this he had built a revolving gate with ratchets which allowed it to turn only in one direction, and which gave upon a stairs leading to the street. And then he had another sign painted and hung near the gate. This sign said—"To the Egress."

Zimmerman grinned fleetingly.

"Well, they found the egress all right. That was O. K. for those days, but conditions have changed. We got a different idea about the public today—treat them right, treat them fair, don't pull no Egress stuff on them. Treat them like brothers, not boobs. Don't you think that's good, the way I work it into my speech?" he appealed.

"Yes," said Queenie impersonally. "I always liked that egress story."

Zimmerman continued with his speech. See, wasn't this good? What about this word? Greenberg, she had changed it to this here. How did it strike them?

"Now I'd like to get something funny to end it up with, because once I heard a Chautauqua lecturer say, when I met him on a train once in Iowa—him and me we were snowed in together and got well acquainted—well, he said, 'Always set down on a laugh.' Can't you think up a funny joke for me, Queenie? You used to tell so many of them."

But Queenie couldn't. She looked around the room, she essayed one or two funny stories, but they didn't seem to fit.

"I don't seem to be able to."

Queenie was bored. A speech before a convention wasn't interesting.

The men probably wouldn't pay much attention, anyhow. If she could go now she and Chic would have a lovely drive back to the station in a taxi, then the ride on the train.

"I think your speech is all right as it is, Mr. Zimmerman," she said. "I think you'll get away with it all right. I wouldn't worry any more about it now."

From time to time, as Zimmerman had talked, his eyes had silently sought Queenie's. But now her interest was in Chic. She responded to Zimmerman when he spoke, answered him promptly, but they were only perfunctory replies.

Now and then as they had talked, Zimmerman had turned to her eagerly for corroboration on some little thing that meant much to him, but her attention had wandered. Although Zimmerman could not quite put it into words, a *rapport* was missing.

"Look here, I got something I guess 'll interest you all right," Zimmerman said. "Just came this morning. I been sort of holding it back because I wanted to surprise you. It's this here."

From his desk he picked a cablegram and held it up.

"See this? Where do you think it's from? Blackpool, that's where! Yes, sir, Blackpool, England," he repeated.

Blackpool is a town a short distance from London, where there is an amusement resort, and where the chief amusement park interests are located. Sometimes it is called "The Coney Island of England."

"Now just pin your ears back and listen. Now, all ready, everybody pinned?"

"Sure," said Queenie.

"Yes, Mr. Zimmerman," Chic responded.

The message was from the managing director of the associated amusement enterprises of Blackpool, asking if Zimmerman would consider coming to Blackpool during the summer to make a survey of their situation. Blackpool was not drawing the patronage it should, the cinemas were an increasing threat, and would he check up on the rides, concessions, free acts and attractions?

It was an honor, indeed, and when the news was given to the *Billboard* and the trade papers with departments devoted to the outdoor show world, it would be something of a sensation. It would be a bow, indeed, to the superiority of American amusement resorts, and the one man selected was Zimmerman.

Zimmerman laid down the yellow blank.

"Well, what do you think of that?"

There was nothing in the simple words to indicate the precious little day dream which had been going on in his mind ever since he had received it. He would accept the great honor, of course. A splendid vision rose before him: it was of himself being received on the other side.

There were dignitaries, the Lord Mayor of Blackpool, speeches, receptions. A great man, indeed, he would be there; he wouldn't be representing just Coney Island and the amusement parks, he would be representing America! Of course, not like a great State official, but still America, the acknowledged leader in the world of outdoor amusements.

He not only had this vision, but another and more precious one. This concerned Queenie. It would be their honeymoon trip. He had been asked to come in August, when the season is at its height; his own work at Coney

Island would take care of itself during this time, and then he and Queenie would have their honeymoon trip.

"What you think, Queenie?" he repeated aloud.

Queenie thought it was a good idea; yes, just fine. It would be a change for him, too.

"Don't you think so, Chic?" she finished.

As she talked, Zimmerman looked at her with a growing fear in his heart. Was this all that it meant to her?—this biggest honor which had ever come into his life? As he listened to her and saw her eyes drift away from him, he felt a strange hollowness within him. It was as if a balloon, which had been lifting him up and buoying him along, had suddenly begun to lose air.

Zimmerman had never actually asked Queenie to marry him. Many times he had hovered at the border, it had threaded in and out of his conversation. There had been an "understanding."

Of course he was much older; he was "set" in his ways. But the gulf, which at first had seemed so impossible to span, had bit by bit grown smaller. In experience and knowledge of life Queenie was much older than the average girl her age. She had kicked around, she had been thrown up against the world; it held few secrets from her.

She and Zimmerman were interested in the same thing; they spoke the same language. He would make her a good husband; she would make him a good wife. He had money; she had beauty and ambition. A very desirable match, indeed, he thought.

But now Queenie had lost interest in him. Hardly listened when he read the cablegram from Blackpool.

Cotton had stolen his girl. That

was it, he reasoned. Queenie hadn't changed. The damned squirt had come and taken her from under his nose, this bandy-legged boob from the sticks. Who was he? Nobody. Still worked in a factory of some kind. Had hit on one good ride idea, probably never would again. The world was full of Johnnie jump-ups, who got an idea for one invention and were never heard of again.

Cotton would wake up pretty soon and find that something had happened to him. It wouldn't be the first time that people had got into trouble who had fooled around the machinery.

Zimmerman continued to talk. They had had a nice ride out to the plant, had they? Enjoyed being out in the country, did they? Going back to town together, were they? Had they seen many shows lately? Been stepping out to any of the dances?

"Queenie's a good dancer, don't you think, Cotton?"

Indeed, Chic thought so.

"Just fine," he said eagerly.

As he listened to them talk he became more and more taciturn, motionless. The gayness which had animated him when they had first come had gone. His eyes drew down to narrow little slits.

"So you don't think much of this here Blackpool idea?" he said casually to Queenie after a while. "Suppose you was in my place, wouldn't you kind of want to see what it's like over there? You might see some good wire walking. Not in England, I guess, but in France. You could come back by way of France and Paris. Some of the best wire people in the world come from France."

Queenie didn't think she'd care much about it. It might be all right, sometimes, but not just now.

"I expect we ought to think about going, Mr. Zimmerman," she said.

"It's such a nice day I'd like to get out in the sun. Don't you think so, Chic?"

"Yes, I do, Queenie."

So they wanted to get away from him; wanted to be alone together! Why, it was even boring for Queenie to talk to him now. Wanted to get out and bounce around in a taxi with Chic. This whelp had robbed him of the most precious thing that had ever come into his life. Well, he'd see—

"Cotton, there's one thing I wanted to speak to you about. Clear forgot it when we were looking at the top awhile ago. You'll excuse us, won't you, Queenie? Won't take a minute."

Of course she would excuse them, Queenie said. She'd call up a taxi and get 'em started.

"All right, Cotton, step this way," said Zimmerman.

As the door to the plant proper opened, Chic could see again the bustle of activity, and again the dull thumping of the steel hammer rose to his ears.

This was queer. What did Mr. Zimmerman want? Wished to discuss some technical point, probably.

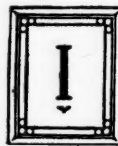
"You've sure got a great little plant here, Mr. Zimmerman."

Zimmerman paused and turned around slowly, ominously.

"You think so, do you?"

CHAPTER XXXV

AN ULTIMATUM



IT didn't take very long, the bitter little affair which took place in a rear work room. It was in what was called "the studio room," where Chic had seen the men working on the big, grotesque *papier-mâché*

faces. Their noon whistle had blown, and the men had gone out to eat their lunch, sitting on benches in the lazy sunshine, gossiping and talking.

"I ain't anything to *discuss* with you," said Zimmerman as he paused in the middle of the floor. "I've just got something to *tell* you, and I ain't going to tell you but once."

"What is it, Mr. Zimmerman?"

"I want you to lay off Queenie."

"What do you mean?"

"What I said. Stay away from her, that's what I mean. She belongs to me, and I don't want you fooling around with that girl any more. Understand?"

Chic felt a great quaking, and as he looked into Zimmerman's hypnotic eyes he trembled. What terrible thing had happened? Why, a few minutes ago Mr. Zimmerman was laughing and telling a funny story about P. T. Barnum—really jovial for him. But now Zimmerman's thick, square body was planted before him, his arms hanging at his side like mauls.

"I—I don't believe I do understand you, Mr. Zimmerman. I like Queenie. I think she's a nice girl. I'm going to marry her."

Zimmerman stiffened, the fingers on his hand moved slightly.

"You mean you *think* you are. She's my girl—do you understand what I mean?"

"No, sir."

"I mean she's going to marry *me*. Pretty game you're trying to put over! Everything was set between me and her, and then you had to come along with your sissy ways and try to bust it up. Well, you ain't going to do it, that's all."

As Chic stood there and a deep, powerful beating of his heart sent the blood rushing over him, he thought of

what it meant to him. He was in Zimmerman's power.

Zimmerman had the top—his mother's money had gone into it—what if it failed? Zimmerman could do almost anything to it; he would not stop at anything.

But the top was not all. There was Queenie. He could not let Zimmerman take her from him. No, he could not tolerate that. He must protect Queenie; she might not want to marry Zimmerman. There was no doubt that she was honestly in love with him, Chic.

"I don't think I know what you mean, Zimmerman," he heard himself say.

He was amazed at this new self. It was the first time he had ever addressed him without the "Mister."

"Kind of hard of understanding today, ain't you, Chic?"

"I don't think so."

"Well, I'll tell you again. Now get this." Zimmerman's hand reached out and a thick, heavy finger slowly tapped Chic on the shoulder. "You cut Queenie out, and don't you have no more to do with her, or you'll wish plumb to the bottom of hell you did. That's all I got to say."

Zimmerman turned, there was a sliding, hunching, animal movement of his shoulders and slowly he walked away.

Chic stood a moment, in him the deepest and fiercest feeling of resentment that he had ever known against a human being, while that thick, threatening back moved slowly away. Suddenly he started after it, and coming up behind Zimmerman, tapped him on the shoulder as Zimmerman had tapped him a few moments before.

"Don't walk away from me," he commanded. "I've got something to

tell you. I'm going to see Queenie all I want to, and you won't have a damned thing in the world to say about it. That's all I've got to say."

Then Chic walked off.

The taxi had come when he returned to Queenie, and, getting in, they started in the lovely sunshine for the station.

Zimmerman had taken his place by the studio window. As the taxi rolled away he stood looking at Queenie lightly and pleasantly talking with Chic. Her hand fluttered out and touched his arm as she gayly chatted.

There Zimmerman stood silently watching them. And from the expression on his face, and by a droop that had come into his shoulders, he suddenly seemed a pathetic figure—but only for a moment.

Then the droop passed from his shoulders, his neck seemed to stiffen, there was a slight swelling in the thick muscles of his jaw. And then he turned and slowly started down the hall toward his office, his shoulders again giving that peculiar hunching movement.

One of the artisans, who colored the *papier-mâché* faces, hurried after him, with a sketch in his hand, to ask a question about some detail of the work.

"Mr. Zimmerman," he said, as he caught up with the slow-moving figure.

But Zimmerman did not turn. The cold, aloof figure marched on, the boards creaking under his weight.

"Mr. Zimmerman," called the man more loudly. "I wanted to ask you something."

"Don't bother me. Get out."

Zimmerman had paused momentarily as he said this, but he had not bothered to look in the direction of the workman, and then again he took up

his heavy tread in the direction of the office.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE BLACK CLOUD



S Chic looked back upon that short, bitter scene in the bizarre studio room, its walls hung with the great laughing masks, he was amazed at how he had stood up to Zimmerman.

Although Chic had developed, and although a moral spine was beginning to form, he had moments of uneasiness. What could Zimmerman do? He might try to get the top away from him. He might by some legal hook or crook try to beat him out of it.

But Chic had his contracts with him. Zimmerman was the one who was putting the money into it. He wouldn't cut off his nose to spite his face. Might he try to trick the top in some way and pretend that it was a failure and then try to get it out of his hands?

Chic went to a lawyer and had him go over the contracts, although they had been gone over many times before. The lawyer was sufficiently noncommittal, after the way of his kind, but there seemed to be no loophole.

Chic felt better; nevertheless, he was still haunted with a vague foreboding. That look on Zimmerman's face as he had stood in the hall at the plant, that tightening of his heavy jaws, the slight, almost imperceptible, clutching of his fingers—it meant something. Or did it? Maybe he had just imagined it.

Maybe Zimmerman was no longer working on the top. He might delay it and hope to wear Chic out in some way; evade the contract. But there was a way to find this out.

Chic piled onto the train and went to where the plant was located. This time he walked from the station, and as he came near his heart played a lovely little tune, for there, looming over the building, was the top. It was no longer a skeleton; the gaunt steel beams were now covered with layers of composition which later would be painted until they represented a gay, whirling top.

One of the little cars was now being mounted; it would work its way through the top as the top spun, thus giving the double motion feature that had first attracted Zimmerman.

Chic came away walking, as the phrase goes, on air. Zimmerman wasn't neglecting the top; it was being built, work was going ahead, everything would come out all right.

During the wait a poignant thing happened to Chic. One day, as he was looking through the Sunday paper, his mind had the curious sensation of seeing something which couldn't possibly be there. His eyes leaped back—yes, it was there, and with almost the same instantaneous flash, his heart beat rapidly. It was a picture in the rotogravure section of Charmian, playing tennis at Cannes, in the Riviera.

Chic sat holding the paper, staring at the picture, a strange trembling taking possession of him. And suddenly Charmian seemed to be in the room, and in his heart was an ache which he had thought was buried.

He clipped out the picture and started to put it in his purse; but no, he mustn't carry around a picture of Charmian when he was engaged to Queenie. Why, Queenie was a fine girl; really a remarkable girl. He threw the clipping away.

A few days later he was surprised to find that he must not have thrown

the picture into the wastebasket after all, for there it was among some things in his bureau drawer.

A strange restlessness seized Chic; a feeling that all was not well, and yet what could be wrong? Zimmerman was going ahead building the top, the contracts were binding, what could happen? Nothing, he told himself. Yet he was pervaded by a sense of impending doom; "something was going to happen."

And then he would stiffen; the world was a tough nut, but he would crack it. Other people had; he would do the same.

"I can do anything that I *will* to do."

He went about much with Queenie, but the dramas and legitimate shows, which laid such a spell upon him, did not appeal to her. She liked musical comedies, where there was plenty of gayety and dancing; and she liked the big movie palaces on Broadway with their elaborate "presentations" and ballets.

And she was, as she said, "goofy" about vaudeville. She liked skating rinks, dancelands, and to Chic's surprise she enjoyed the rodeo, which was being held at Madison Square Garden, with its wild riding and roping and displays of physical dexterity. At such moments she would lean forward absorbed in what was going on below, her quick eyes seeing feats of balancing and timing that his saw not at all.

"Honestly, kid, don't you like this better than you do those gloomy theater shows on Broadway?" she asked during a wait in the arena.

Yes, he liked it all right, Chic said. He squeezed her hand.

"Yes, I think I do, Queenie," he assured her.

It was at this time that something

happened. One evening, just after he returned to his room from work, the telephone rang; the landlady came out into the hall and shouted up: "Mr. Cotton—*Oo-oo-oh*—telephone. Lady's voice speaking," in a way that made Chic wish to pull her limb from limb.

It was all right for her to shout up the hall as if she were communicating with a sky-writer, and it was all right to announce that it was a lady's voice speaking, but the *Ooo-oo-oh* made him bloodthirsty.

And yet, such was Chic, he never once mentioned it to her. And always, every time she *Ooo-ed* up the stairway it irritated him. Queer cakes, human beings are. But if we were all logical and always did the sane and intelligent thing, what a drab, uninteresting world it would be.

It was Queenie.

"Hello, kid," came her voice with the faint huskiness which was more noticeable over the telephone than when one spoke to her face to face. "Say, what you got on this evening? Anything special?"

A strange question, as the night before Chic had taken her to a vaudeville show, and it had been almost one o'clock when he had started home, after telling her good-by at her hotel. She knew that he had set this evening aside to read an engineer's book on some phase of radio, a subject which was interesting him more and more, and now Queenie was calling him up.

"I've got something to tell you," said Queenie. "I want you to come out this evening, about eight o'clock, say."

Her voice grew serious, and an anxious, subdued note came into it.

"I went around to my mitt reader this afternoon, and she says did I know anybody, and then she described

you to a T. She sees a black cloud hanging over you. Then she told me a lot of other stuff. It got me all worked up and nervous, especially that description of you, even down to that cowlick you got."

How like Queenie that was, Chic thought. She had gone to her "mitt reader," the mitt reader had filled her ears, and now superstitious Queenie was ready to believe it.

This streak of credulity and superstition ran through all the performers at Coney Island. In other matters they were cynics and unbelievers, but in signs and portents and "readings" their faith was unwavering.

Of course, sometimes these predictions didn't come true, but they could tell numberless times that such things had "worked out." Maybe it would this time, and again they would go to their favorite astrologer, numerologist, palmist, clairvoyant, medium or crystal gazer.

"It's all fooliness," Chic said to himself, as Queenie told what had happened. But Queenie wanted him to come to see her. That was enough.

"Sure, I'll come," he agreed.

After he had eaten dinner, Chic descended into the subway station at Times Square and waited for a train to whisk him away to Coney Island. An express came rumbling in, people hurled themselves off, more people hurled themselves on. The doors closed, the train gave a slight movement, then the pillars began to glide by.

And now how calmly and unconcernedly he pulled out of Times Square for Coney Island. What a great adventure it had been the first time!

After the train had got through the central section of Brooklyn, it began to pop up in the open spaces like a

mole. It would stay on top of the ground a few moments, seem to look around, and then down it would pop again and scurry away into its dark burrow.

As it popped up, Chic had a curious, unplaced feeling. Why, it was new, different from any time he had ever come to Coney Island. It was kind of hard to put his finger on it, and then he knew—spring was coming!

Yes, that was it. Spring! On Broadway and Times Square there was no sign of it—just the unending cement and the hurrying, shoving, ceaselessly moving crowds—but now he could see the first indications of it like the faint, rosy streaks at dawn.

The train, which had once carried such sweltering, panting masses of humanity, was now almost deserted as the guard called out, "Stillwell Avenue. Last stop."

How well he remembered the first time he had heard it. People had tumbled out, there had been the dull, heavy hurrying of feet on the wooden platform—what a confusion it had seemed then!

Now how simple it was! Why, after you got to know Coney Island it wasn't much more complicated than Junction City. A small town of twenty thousand it was, when it was running full tilt, engaged in the business of amusing the public.

Chic sniffed the air. Yes, something was different. Why, spring was coming to Coney Island. Its long winter sleep was over; the bear was waking up. It was not fully awake yet, it was just beginning to stir and stretch and nose around.

A thrill ran over Chic. Spring! Coney Island was coming to life! *His* Coney Island. Or *was* it? He wondered.

As he started down Surf Avenue he could see more signs of it. Workmen had been painting the roller coasters, they had been regilding the minarets and towers of Luna Park and Steeplechase. The rides and concessions were being put into shape.

Suddenly an eerie feeling laid hold of Chic. The gaunt, spidery Ferris Wheel had moved, or had it? Must be imagination. No, it wasn't; why, it was actually turning, sluggishly and stiffly, but moving. And then he saw that workmen were experimenting with it. Parts would have to be replaced, changes made, and all would have to be painted and decorated before the hot, sweltering crowds descended upon it.

The Boardwalk lay deserted, save for a few lonely souls wrapped in coats, moving slowly up and down it like lost wandering spirits. Under the walk itself, on the beach, still were little swirls and cones of snow, and there were strange things that the tides of the winter had brought in and left, like a faithful but misguided dog, and it was as if they said: "Look what I've brought you."

Crack-crack! came a sharp sputter—a new concessionaire was trying out a shooting gallery. He gave a rope a tug and a rusty pendulum slowly began to creak back and forth. That wouldn't do at all—it would have to be oiled and painted—why, half the battered ducks would have to be replaced, too. Well, they had served a host of human beings who had wanted to show how deadly they were with a cat rifle.

As Chic walked along amid this growing stir of life, an exquisite exaltation came over him. Spring! Coney Island would soon be opening.

The painters and carpenters and

electricians were here now; they would leave, and one by one the performers would begin to appear—Mme. Murta, the Hungarian Bearded Lady; Half Pint; Elfa, the Elephant Skinned Girl; Dan, the Skeleton Dude, all the people he had come to know.

He gave a start—on a billboard above a "grind show," painters and carpenters had been at work getting out a new banner line for the poor unfortunates who were soon to be housed in its halls. The canvas had been stretched; Mme. Murta's feet and knees had been painted in, and a faint outline showed where her beard was to be.

Mme. Murta! What a tragic figure she was—aloof, lonely, coldly intellectual and yet somehow yearning! The way she despised her audiences and the touching pretense she made that she was proud of her beard.

Some day, during the summer, the Giant Top would be here in Coney Island. Then, indeed, he would be somebody. What a great occasion the opening would be! Announcements would be sent out to the park managers all over the country, they would be invited to see it tried out; and then, when they saw its success, they would place their orders. A second top would be built, next winter another—some day he would be a rich man.

Suddenly he had the feeling of seeing some one he knew. For a moment Chic could not quite place him. That slight figure, that square, broad chin which protruded too far—who was it?

"Why, hello, Mr. Cotton, how're you? Glad to see you. Back to Coney kind o' early, ain't you?"

Frozo, of course. The last time Chic had seen him he was sitting on his sway-backed bed, a little leather strap over his neck, torturing a saxo-

phone. And now here he was at Coney Island.

After Frozo had perfected himself in the art of the cry, the sneeze, the caw, the gliss and flutter tongue he had got a job in a night club orchestra, but he hadn't liked it. It was a world that he was not used to; the people were different. He was an outdoor showman, and now spring was coming. Coney Island would soon be opening. But it wasn't easy to return. Grind shows no longer wanted mechanical dolls, however great a novelty they had once been.

He had come out, and, as he said, had "looked things over," and had decided to start a hot dog stand. But he hadn't been able to swing it alone, as he must pay down one-third of the season's rent on the signing of the lease. He had gone to Queenie and Queenie had lent him seventy dollars, and now he had found a wow of a location.

"Looky here at the spot I got my option on," he said as he led Chic down the street. It'd catch the people comin' back from the beach, he explained; people always liked hot dogs after they had been swimming. He would put up glass windshields, it saved gas, too—he continued.

"Well, good-by, Mr. Cotton, see you this summer. I think we're going to have a big season this year, don't you?"

As Chic walked along by himself, after Frozo had left, the pathos of it struck him. Once Frozo had been the bally sensation of the grind shows, his picture appeared in the papers, crowds had stared at him open mouthed; the little wheel of time had turned, and now he was looking for a hot dog stand.

Then Chic thought how much it

was like Queenie. One of the show people at Coney Island was having a hard row to hoe; he needed money, she had it. Maybe she would get it back; maybe she wouldn't. Many times Chic had come upon such generousities on her part, but she herself never spoke of them.

As Chic turned into a deserted side street which led to the Boardwalk, two rough-looking men stepped out of a dark door of what had once been a pit show, but which was now deserted and forlorn. Lost in his thoughts, Chic hardly realized that they were there until the men had drawn up squarely before him.

"Hello! Say, can you tell us where Mermaid Avenue is?" asked one of them.

"Yes," returned Chic, now conscious of them for the first time. "You're going in the wrong direction. It's over this way."

As he gave the direction the two men edged closer to him.

"Can you give us a light, too?"

"Yes, certainly."

His hand went into his pocket, and then silently and tigerishly the men leaped upon him, their fists flying out, there was a flash of a knife. Chic felt himself struggling, he heard a strange, far-away voice which must be his trying to call for help. But the words would not come, for suddenly and unaccountably it was growing dark.

"I mustn't do this," he thought, and for a moment he seemed to float. He tried to take a step, but the sidewalk wasn't there—and then a great, peaceful darkness descended upon him.

Now he lay upon the sidewalk, bleeding, white and motionless. The two men bent over him—they had done their work well. A car driven by a third man was waiting. The car

started slowly down the street, then gradually its speed increased.

CHAPTER XXXVII

CHIC ACCEPTS THE CHALLENGE



CHIC came to very slowly, and at first he had the feeling that he might be dead. What if he were—it didn't make any difference. Nothing made any difference—tired—very tired—he always had been tired.

But where was he? People were coming and going; a terrifically big woman with a tiny voice was fussing over him, putting something or other on his head. Why, it was a hospital!

That was strange; must be some mistake about that—joke on somebody—well, he would just go to sleep again—so tired—and now that woman was diddledaddling with him again. Sleep, sweet sleep.

Slowly, as the days went by, he began to recuperate. But it had been a narrow squeak. Even the police sergeant admitted that, and he wasn't in the habit of admitting anything that reflected on his precinct.

Yeh, Chic had been knocked about a bit; must of been done by some ginks from New York, or somewhere.

Coney Island was practically free from such things, especially this time of year. Naturally they had some trouble with Saturday and Sunday and holiday crowds, pushin' and shovin' mostly, and some of the young bucks gettin' too fresh, but this was unusual. He'd send a couple of his best men out on the case. Such things couldn't go on, especially this time of year.

But gradually the sergeant lost interest in Chic. After all, hadn't Chic lived? No money had been stolen. It was merely a case of disorderly con-

duct. Besides, a couple of new cases had suddenly developed; the newspapers were pounding them, the police were all activity again.

Indeed, in New York this affair on a side street at Coney was nothing at all—a drop in the bucket. And at about this time a tabloid discovered some charred human bones in a cellar, or somewhere, and the drop of water at Coney Island completely evaporated and was never heard of again.

At first, in his confused state, Chic could not understand why it had happened. But as soon as his mind cleared he knew who was back of it. Zimmerman, of course. And now that it had happened, Chic could see how steadily it had been building up to this climax.

Chic told his suspicions to the sergeant. The sergeant raised his bushy eyebrows slightly. The great Zimmerman? The most powerful man in Coney Island? He didn't think it likely. Still, he would look into it. He looked into it and it was as he had thought—Chic was mistaken.

At first Chic was so weak and so wholly uninterested that nothing made any difference. Just get along from hour to hour was all that was necessary. But as his strength returned his resentment began to grow. All the fighting spirit in him rose. He would not stop now. Would not back down. Never!

When he had first come to New York, before he had learned to fend for himself, possibly he would have quit. But now his backbone was growing; he would see the contest through to the bitter end. He liked Queenie, he had asked her to marry him, and he *would* marry her, let Zimmerman rage all he wanted to.

Also, he had the idea that possibly Zimmerman was satisfied now. Zim-

merman had had his revenge, all would be well. Maybe everything would run along smoothly until the top was tried out. Then, as soon as he could, he would shake himself free from Zimmerman and go his own way.

But little did Chic know the iron man he was dealing with. To Zimmerman's way of thinking, Chic had got off lightly—in reality it was only a warning. Hadn't he told Cotton to "lay off Queenie?" Well, he wasn't in the habit of saying a thing twice.

At first Chic had thought that Zimmerman might take advantage of the situation by picking a flaw in the contract and not go ahead with the erection of the top.

It would be an easy thing to do; he could delay it on the excuse that he was short of some of the materials, or that the steel work was not as it should be; but Zimmerman took no such attitude. Deep in him was this high regard for his profession. All the managers of the amusement parks in America knew that he was building a new ride; he must finish it and offer it to the public.

Queenie was not surprised at what had happened. It was just another example of the mitt reader being right, and her faith in her source of divination was deeper and more unshakable than ever.

"I knowed something was going to happen, but I couldn't figure out about the black cloud. See how reasonable it was?"

Although Queenie was indignant at the unfairness of it—at Zimmerman sending out thugs to beat up an unsuspecting person; pretty crumbly, that was—strangely enough, she did not hold it against him.

In the world she had moved in all her life—the world of amusement

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parks, circuses and carnivals — the scales were not finely balanced. The people she had always known would stop at nothing to gain their ends, and this was merely another manifestation of it. Personal problems called for personal solutions.

At first she was a bit awed and overwhelmed. Zimmerman's revenge was much worse and more drastic than she had expected, and now she hesitated in fear of Zimmerman. Maybe she and Chic had best see each other secretly.

But when Chic viewed it in no such light, and insisted that they meet openly, she admired him all the more. A man to stand up against Zimmerman! Not in all Coney Island was there another person who would do that. And so Chic took on new glory in her eyes.

But in spite of Chic's courage, Queenie had moments of uneasiness.

"We got to watch that hyena. He'll do anything," she cautioned.

Vases of flowers appeared at the hospital. Queenie's idea of helping Chic get well was to sneak past the watchfulness of the nurse boxes of candy and dainties in such quantities and richness as would have incapacitated a man in the full vigor of his physical powers.

When Chic was able to be removed from the hospital, she was there with a car and installed him in her hotel. As soon as he was strong enough she rode up and down the Boardwalk with him in a rolling chair, and when he had recovered still more she led him to the very heart and soul of the performers' Coney Island — Surf Avenue — and there exhibited him.

The others didn't see it that way.

"Aren't you afraid, Queenie?" asked Mme. Murta, the Hungarian Bearded Lady. "I watch Mr. Zimmerman," she said with the faint T

she always put before his name, "and what I see eet ees not good. He t'inks too much alone."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

OUTSIDE, LOOKING IN



AS Chic's strength returned, a wondrous scene of magic and beauty opened before him. Or so it seemed to him at that period of his growth and development.

When he had gone to the hospital, the bear of Coney Island was just waking from its long winter of hibernation. It was beginning to stretch and yawn and rub its eyes; the first workmen were returning, the roller coasters were being painted, the lions and tigers and horses of the merry-go-rounds were being brought back from the storage warehouses and fresh coats of paint were being applied.

Now and then a merry-go-round would creak, begin to rock unsteadily, and a strange, discordant blare would rise from the drums and tambourines of the mechanical orchestra. Men with bags over their shoulders were clambering slowly over the great electric faces and illuminations of Steeplechase, busily putting in colored bulbs and globes.

On every side was the sound of sawing and hammering; a boat at the top of a water ride suddenly came to life and went wabbling unsteadily down the track to a lake in which an old straw hat was floating.

The bear had shaken off its slumber and was now fully awake and very much alive, indeed. And as Chic convalesced he watched the fascinating change come over Coney Island.

The carpenters and electricians and workmen grew fewer; only here and

there was to be heard the heavy pounding of hammers; the faded boards which enclosed the store fronts along Surf Avenue came down, the sharp sputter of a shooting gallery rattled and ricocheted over the deserted phantasmagoria.

What was that?—that haunting, tantalizing, penetrating odor? A hot dog stand getting under way—all was well with Coney.

Then the performers began to appear, as if birds from a small and restricted section had migrated for the winter and now were all back and chattering their adventures.

But, no, not quite all—Ed Anders, the glass blower, had got bumped off. Been doing a cotton States carnival, and was making an all-night jump from one town to another, when the truck had gone over an embankment. Tough; left two kids; but such things had to happen.

Besides, Mme. Murta, the Hungarian Bearded Lady; Elfa, the Elephant Skinned Girl, and Dan, the Skeleton Dude, many new ones had been recruited from lesser parks and carnivals, some from vaudeville, and some from Europe. For some it was to be their first season at Coney, and a great honor it was, indeed. For years they had looked forward to it.

And then there were the monstrosities, the poor unfortunates with misshapen bodies, revolting to look at, and over whom always hung a pall; the pariahs and outcasts of the show world. There was a tradition that monstrosities did not live long—it might have been due to their tortured bodies.

Chic watched a scene of enchantment and magic take place before his eyes. A space was cleared on one of the side streets, great trucks hauled lovely steel beams and dumped them

on the cleared space; an enchanting concrete foundation went down, and then a good genie—it could have been nothing less!—moved among the tangle of beams and crosspieces, and with amazing and unbelievable rapidity the Giant Top rose and had its being.

After a time, when the Giant Top was actually done, finished and completed, then would come the great day of its opening to the public. It had been tested at the plant; the dynamos had been started, the top had revolved, the workmen at the factory had clambered on and taken a ride, and it had been pronounced a success, but that meant nothing.

The public—that great and fearsome giant which ruled over the park world—must be pleased. But what did the public want? No one knew. It was as fickle as a courtesan.

In all the length and breadth of park-land there was none who could tell whether or not a new amusement device would please until it was actually placed before the public. If the public liked it, well and good; money in the bank. If it didn't—well, it was tough luck.

But, of course, the public would like the Giant Top. There would be no trouble about that.

It was decided to open the top on the Sunday before the Fourth of July. By that time the top would be completed, Abie Katz would have had time to promote it, the park managers from over the country would be there, and then the top would be put into action.

If it were a nice Sunday there would be a big crowd, the top would be launched, and then it would catch the Fourth of July trade.

Never by the slightest word or gesture had Zimmerman made reference

to the attack upon Chic. But sometimes Chic caught the big boss looking at him with those thick-lidded, unblinking, snaky eyes. Chic remained on guard; no more strolls at night, no more chances.

Things had not gone well with Queenie's motion picture. Zimmerman had made it, now it must be released. The viewing departments for the motion picture concerns had looked it over—pretty crummy, they said. Old style. The girl was pretty, had a figure, but—well, she lacked screen personality. Besides, the "talkies" were now in the ascendant. Didn't think they could release it. Might later, if the price were right.

Zimmerman did not blame it on himself, nor on his lack of knowledge of the picture business. Hadn't he been in the show business himself all his life? Queenie had been doing fine, and then had lost interest in it. And she'd lost interest at about the time Chic had begun to hang around her. It was simple.

One night after the blow-off, and after the monkeys had gone home, Zimmerman came out of his office in the Dragon's Gorge and walked slowly down the Midway to the pass gate. Any other park manager would not have gone straight from his office to his home, but would have taken a turn over the park to see how things were going. Done a little snooping.

But not Zimmerman. Details did not interest him. He could hire them done; they were the work of underlings. If the men he had hired couldn't look after the details, kick them out. Get somebody else.

He walked more slowly than usual, lost in a haze of reflections and moods.

The ticket takers, barkers, rabbit

game workers, concessionaires, platform men and salaried operators of the park edged toward him, hoping he would speak to them, but the slow-moving man in the exaggerated clothes with the walking stick dangling from his wrist gave them only the briefest of grunts. Sometimes not at all.

Pausing under a lone light, he glanced at his wrist watch. He would go to the Dog Wagon and get a snack. He had had such a rush of work that he hadn't been there recently, and he ought to go; ought to keep in touch with people. He'd get some coffee, too.

So he told himself, but in reality he wanted to go because he was lonesome. Strange about that, the biggest and most important man in Coney Island; in fact, the most important park man in America, revered and respected and looked up to—and yet sometimes a poignant loneliness came over him.

He hadn't noticed it so much a few years ago when he was struggling for his place, but now it came to him oftener and oftener. Could get along pretty well during the day, but now the evenings seemed long. Sometimes in the middle of the night he would get up, dress and, as he said, "prowl around the streets." Then after a time he would go back to bed. The next morning he would feel lonesome again.

The Dog Wagon came to view ahead as cheerful as a light in a clearing. As he approached he could hear laughter and the merry chatter within; unconsciously his steps became a little faster.

He knew how it would be when he entered. There would be a hush, the rattle of the dishes would grow less, the performers and park employees would speak to him soberly and respectfully, eager to be acknowledged.

And then, as he sat down at the stool, the waiter would come toward him.

"Nice night, Mr. Zimmerman. What will you have to-night, Mr. Zimmerman?"

Pausing, Zimmerman looked through the window at the gay little scene within. His face clouded. There, sitting on one of the stools, was Chic, and beside him was Queenie.

Chic was the center of attention. To-morrow was the great day for him; the top would be opened to the public, and now, on this, the night before, Chic was the most popular and talked of person in Coney Island. If the top were a success he would soon be rich, at least in the terms that Coney Island measured money.

A little group around him was listening to every word he said. Now and then flattering appreciations of laughter went up.

Zimmerman saw the flushed and triumphant look on Chic's face, saw Queenie gazing at him admiringly. With an unconscious, proprietary air her hand reached out and smoothed the hair over his ear.

A different scene it was, indeed, from the time when Chic had stood outside the Dog Wagon and had seen Zimmerman sitting at the counter with Queenie, and when Zimmerman's thick, stubby hand had reached out and patted Queenie's.

Slight as Queenie's action had been in smoothing the hair over Chic's ear, it was not lost on Zimmerman. His back stiffened, his thick shoulders squared, and then he started toward the wagon. But he had taken only a few steps when he paused, once more looking at the bright, animated, noisy scene within. Then he turned and slowly walked away.

Now he was in Surf Avenue again

and stalked down the deserted, tomb-like street. He found his car and chauffeur.

"I'm tired," he thought as he got in.

He gave a slight gesture of his hand to his driver, the little flag straightened out, the car rolled away.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE FINAL WARNING



CHIC moved about his room the following day, getting himself all dressed up. Big day to-day. The biggest day of his life. He looked out the window. Fine day, too. The kind of weather that would send everybody to Coney Island where all people should rightly go.

His room now was larger, the wrinkled, weather-warped fruit lithograph no longer looked down upon him, and the chipped white bed with a sunken garden in the middle was gone, for he had moved to a hotel, and the landlady no longer waddled to the foot of the stairs and shouted up that he was wanted on the telephone, *Ooo-hoo*, lady's voice speaking. He had moved and the landlady was still in the land of the living.

Chic was still employed at the radio factory, but when the day was over his own work really began. It was experimenting with radio, working out ideas of his own; tinkering, he put it. He shared a workshop and experimental laboratory with a man older than himself, and when the mood was on him, worked with fierce concentration far into the night. Time flew, and he himself seemed hardly to exist at all, so absorbing were the problems.

And then the next night possibly he could not work at all. Hated the sight

of the littered workshop. Terrible mess. Inventing and tinkering was wasted time—the strange will-o'-the-wisp led him on.

At twelve thirty the luncheon was to be held on the ground before the top, speeches were to be let loose, news motion pictures were to be taken, reporters were to be out—oh, Abie Katz had spread himself. At the luncheon were to be the biggest park men in the country, two had come from Canada, one from Cuba, and then, after the luncheon, the top at three o'clock was to be opened to the public.

The turnstile would click, the crowd would pile into the top, the mayor of New York would press the button, and then the Giant Top would begin to turn. Slowly at first, then faster and faster.

He picked up that damned speech he would have to make and looked at the pages again. What a terrible job it had been to write it! It looked awfully short and simple now, but what agony and perspiration had gone into it! After he had written the thing he had shown it to Queenie; Queenie had thought it wonderful, and had looked up to him in awe.

"I think it's better than lots of speeches I've heard over the radio," she said. "And by big men, too."

She couldn't remember their names, nor what they talked about, but they were big people, all right.

Chic went over the speech again—no person in his right mind would sit through it. That was certain. But now he was dressed, he picked up his gold-headed cane which long ages ago he had escorted to a dance at a golf club, and as he thought of that dreadful evening an ache came into his heart.

And Charmian? Where was she? What was she doing? Strange that he should think of her, just as he was starting off to participate in the greatest event of his life. He locked the door behind him, deposited the key



Chic's eyes dwelt on her eagerly

with the desk clerk, and slightly swinging his cane, stepped into the summer morning.

What a fascinating, mysterious, enchanting place Coney Island was! Or was it? Sometimes he saw its cheap, tawdry, claptrap side. A feeling of half pity, half disgust rose up in him, and he wanted nothing more to do with it. It was a nickel trap, a crazy illusion where people came in search of pleasure, and where skillful, adroit showmen and concessionaires deftly relieved them of money.

And yet it was a pleasure land, a play place, it made millions forget the dull drabness of their lives, it made

them laugh—why, listen to 'em now as a car came rocketing down a roller coaster—why, of course, it was a wonderful place! He'd always want to be a part of Coney Island.

Early stragglers were just beginning to drift aimlessly along the streets; a few cars came up, found parking space, and the first pleasure seekers of the day began getting out. Some got off the elevated trains, some off the busses, some off the street cars; mostly women and children they were. As soon as the offices and factories closed, the men would join their wives; girls would meet their sweethearts, and the day would begin.

On the beach were gathered the curious-looking lumps of humanity who seem to love a public bathing beach with an undying passion, with figures that God never meant to be seen in public places. But they were cash customers.

And over all, as Chic marched down Surf Avenue, was that haunting, never-to-be-forgotten Coney Island smell—that fishy filtration from the seashore, the sharp, penetrating odors of sizzling hot dogs and frying potato chips compounded with the acrid whiffs from the shooting galleries, the odor of the housekeeping apartments where thousands of human sardines live during the summer.

Whiffs from the peanut stands, the ghostly smells that seemed to come out of the wax works, although Chic never knew whether they really had an odor or not. The odor from the hot corn in the great steaming pails of water, the unplaced odors floating down from the open windows of the Chinese restaurants.

Chic drew his lungs full—yes, it was Coney Island; fascinating, baffling, smelly Coney Island.

All at once Chic felt a sweet, sinking sensation which wasn't a sinking sensation, but a splendid soaring, for before him was the top! The fence had been cleared away, the canvas had come down, and there, in its bright red glory it stood. A puff of wind came along; the flag at the peak straightened out and said the "Giant Top," as if to welcome him.

Before him was an animated scene. Guests for the luncheon were arriving, catering wagons were driving up, waiters were bestirring themselves, and an orchestra was beginning to squeak and twiddle, and newspaper reporters were sniffing hopefully.

Chic felt self-conscious. What if something should go wrong?

"Hello, big boy," called a voice at his elbow. It was Queenie, and he turned to her with a sense of comfort, for crowds had no bewildering and stupefying effect on Queenie. Indeed, they were her meat.

Chic's eyes dwelt on her eagerly. Queenie had never looked more alluring than now. Her bright, blond hair, the blue eyes which seemed so big and innocent, and from which few secrets were held.

As he moved through the invited guests with her, he saw the showmen turning to look at her. And almost at the same time it became known that Chic was the inventor of the top, and now they were a marked couple.

There was a movement among the guests as if a toy had come to life. It was Half Pint. The tiny, childish-looking face was not jolly as it usually was, but was haggard and harassed.

He drew Chic aside.

"What do you think Zimmerman's done?" he asked. "He sent for me this morning and he's fired me, kicked me out, that's what he's done. He

needn't think I'm afraid of him, because I ain't by a damned sight."

As he told the story Chic caught something of the tragedy that it was to Half Pint. Let out of the Hawaiian Show at this time of the season, without notice and explanation. Now he would have to go into a midget troupe, the thing which he despised so utterly, forced into it by the heartless, relentless Zimmerman. Interest in individual midgets had passed, Zimmerman held, and so the little drama had taken place.

"He's mad about something," said Half Pint. "He's been that way for days, and each day he gets worse."

His voice lowered, and he motioned for Chic to bend over.

"I think it's about you takin' Queenie away from him. You be careful, Chic, he won't stop at anything."

Suddenly a frightened look came into Half Pint's face, and Chic turned to see that Zimmerman was quietly looking. He spoke no word, his thick lips were pressed together; a moment he stood motionless, and then his hand made a slight gesture toward Half Pint as if he were *shooing* out an animal.

The people who had turned to smile at Half Pint now caught that a little drama was going on, and stood watching in hushed silence. Then Half Pint shrieked in a high childish treble:

"I won't go, I wont go; you can't make me go." He turned to the crowd. "He's fired me, and now he's trying to kick me out of this, too."

Again Zimmerman's hand made the slight *shooing* gesture.

Half Pint stood, his face working in hatred and humiliation, with fierceness and terror and indignation coming and going like clouds scudding across a sky. And then, without warn-

ing, he rushed at the immovable Zimmerman as if to attack him. But it was not an attack; instead, he fumbled at the boss's hand, finally seized it and clung to it.

"Please don't fire me, Mr. Zimmerman," he begged. "I'll do anything you say, Mr. Zimmerman—work tickets, bally, or anything. I just can't go in a troupe, Mr. Zimmerman. Will you keep me, please, Mr. Zimmerman?"

He plead with Zimmerman; he reminded him how many years he had worked for him; he's never gone out and got drunk on him like lots of 'em had, never sloughed a show.

"You know it's true, Mr. Zimmerman," he appealed. "I wouldn't dare stand up here and say it if it wasn't."

The guests turned to Zimmerman, and in their eyes was a pleading for him to keep the pathetic little joey.

But so far as Zimmerman was concerned they did not exist. Again his hairy hand made that slight gesture. A moment Half Pint stood, and then his eyes went down, his head dropped forward, his arms gave a helpless little motion, and he moved slowly toward the exit.

Chic felt the unfairness and cruelty of it. It was enough to discharge Half Pint without warning, but to add to the humiliation by ordering him out of the park as if he were an animal was inexcusable.

The people murmured, glances were exchanged; one of the showmen came up, and with a friendly gesture touched Zimmerman on the shoulder.

"Let the joey come back, Zim. I feel sorry for the little cuss."

The straight, hard line of Zimmerman's lips opened.

"He heard me," he said.

It was over; the incident was dis-

missed from Zimmerman's mind, the formalities started again. It was like a scene in a motion picture, when for some unaccountable reason the film stops and the people freeze in their places; *click!* something happens, and again they come to life and begin to move.

As Chic looked, Zimmerman made a slight, almost imperceptible gesture with his thumb toward the edge of the crowd. Chic hesitated. Then, in spite of himself, he moved to where the big fellow waited.

Zimmerman stood a moment with eyes resting on him with that peculiar snakiness which brought a churning to Chic's heart.

"I got something to tell you," he said through the thin slit of his lips, "and I ain't going to tell you again. Lay off Queenie."

He paused, his hand reached out, and he tapped Chic on the shoulder.

"You heard me."

Then he turned and slowly walked away.

CHAPTER XL

WHOM THE GODS WOULD DESTROY



HE vivid, distasteful picture of Zimmerman tapping him on the shoulder and then turning and slowly walking away remained with Chic. A sense of uneasiness haunted him. But what was there that Zimmerman could do? Nothing, Chic assured himself. The top would soon be opened, its success was assured, nothing could happen.

"I'm not going to let him spoil my day," Chic decided, and lost himself in the ceremonies.

It was indeed a day of ovation for Chic. Abie Katz knew his way about

when he played up the Cinderella story in Chic. Here was a young man from somewhere or other in the Middle West, who had been in New York less than two years, and who was going to have a new ride introduced at Coney Island. Good copy, just what the American public wanted.

Ordinarily it would have been a wonderful day for Zimmerman, too. It was the sort of thing that he liked; it was his life, something related to amusement parks.

But to-day the conversational fountain in him had dried up. This was strange, too—the very day when he was launching a new ride. Would hurt his business. Might lose some contracts. Another ride builder would have been in the center of the spotlight, eddies of people would have swirled around him, but there was no such elation for Zimmerman.

The reason, of course, was Chic. Slowly and surely Chic was taking Queenie away from him. Taking the one person in all his life that he had set his heart upon.

But Zimmerman made no effort to steal Chic's glory. He let Chic be thrust into the public eye as the inventor of the Giant Top; he was merely the firm which had built it. And, indeed, the papers of incorporation had been made out in Chic's name; he was the person behind it, and so far as the general public knew, alone was the person responsible for it.

Luncheon began. Waiters appeared with food, disappeared, came back again, while at a table to themselves newspaper men were busily engaged in eating. Smokes.

Now it was time for the speeches. Chic felt himself get to his feet, saw a forest of faces about him—what was that damned first line?—an icicle be-

gan to drip down his neck and suddenly a roar of words seemed to come from some place which must be his throat, and he was actually speaking. In a few moments he forgot himself; why, he was doing pretty well. Now he had finished, palms beat upon palms. As Chic sat down, he looked quickly at Queenie, and her eyes anointed him.

Other people, who felt they must speak, got up and told what was wrong with the world, and explained how it could be put back on the right track, and sat down again where they belonged.

After the world had been saved a few times, the chairman called upon Zimmerman. A flutter of expectation ran over the tables—the great Zimmerman, the master showman.

He forced out a few words; he was glad to be here, it was nice to see his old friends again, he hoped they would like the Giant Top.

Not a fine speech at all, but an honest, effective one. The old days were gone, he said; shills and gaff and grift must be banished—the confidence of the American public must not only be won but held.

“If we don’t do this, folks, the movies and ball parks and race tracks are going to get us sure,” he continued simply. “We used to be in the carnival stage ourselves. We never saw the monkeys before, we never expected to see them again, give ’em the gimmick. If we follow that principle today we’ll lose out. Our rides will grow rusty, our swimming pools will dry up, and spiders will build cobwebs on our turnstiles.”

The luncheon was over, a look of contented happiness was now upon the faces of the reporters, and a company of waiters descended upon the tables.



“Zimmerman’s mad about something,” said Half Pint. “I think it’s about you takin’ Queenie”

At last the tables were cleared out, the cameras were poised, and the first person through the turnstile was appropriately snapped. Chic saw the glorious event take place, saw the stream of people mount the stairs, enter the little cars which were to maneuver amid the whirling top, while a great crowd which could not be accommodated stood in line waiting its chance.

Zimmerman was now another man; he was all business, and for him Chic and Queenie did not exist. His step quickened, he seemed to be everywhere at once, and his eyes missed nothing in the complicated machinery which was to send the top spinning on its way.

When the top had been tried out in the lot back of “the plant,” it had been under different conditions. It had not

carried a capacity load, and that is the thing which must at all times be planned for by ride builders.

"It's the Fourth of Julys and the Labor Days that you've got to figure on," Zimmerman often said. "The Mondays and Tuesdays will take care of themselves."

Now the big moment had come.

"Don't you want to take the first ride, Mr. Zimmerman?" Chic asked magnanimously.

The big man waved Chic aside. No, thanks, he could see it better from the ground. A new ride had to be watched; one never knew what it would do.

Zimmerman lifted his hand slightly, the mayor pushed the button. The great top hesitated a breathless moment—suppose it shouldn't work? Oh! terrifying thought—and then the great glittering contrivance began to revolve.

Slowly at first, then faster and faster, and as its speed increased, and the cars began to jig in and out, a scream arose—a blessed, heavenly scream. Then another and another, now it was a shrieking chorus.

All the showmen, park managers and ride builders knew what those screams meant—the invention was a success, for in the ride business there is the phrase "the lady must scream." If the lady doesn't, the ride is only so-so; but if she screams at the threatened danger, and is tossed into the strong arms of her lover, then all is well, and Cupid is in the saddle.

On the other hand, if the lady is tossed too violently, and is jostled out of her dignity, then the turnstiles will not sing their sweet song. Oh! a ride has to sew a very fine seam, indeed.

Again Chic saw the Giant Top loaded, again heard the heavenly screams, saw it stop and load again, while his heart played a little tune.

But Zimmerman viewed it in no such pleasant haze. To him it was an engineering job; it must be watched carefully, there were yet many changes to be made; and always there was the uncertain element of strain.

The Giant Top was a success; there was no doubt about that.

The opening was over; the reporters had gone; the showmen and park managers wanted to study the other rides and concessions of Coney Island. And now Zimmerman would take them in tow and show them the Coney Island that he was so proud of.

As he was ready to leave he drew Chic aside.

"Keep your eye on things," he said. "Don't lose your head just because you've got a crowd around you. That's no way to handle a ride. You stick here, and don't go away."

The first agony of suspense was over, and now, as the top, with its garnish of flags whirled gayly, it seemed to Chic that he could not talk enough. Oh, wonderful, frabjous day!

As the afternoon wore on he saw Zimmerman looking at him from time to time and calmly weighing him, but in his state of elation it made no impression.

Zimmerman had given the day to Chic, but now his time had come, for he was to show the guests over Coney Island. Gates would open for him, he would be the big man. As the guests gathered he wanted very much for Queenie to go. All day he had felt lonesome, and now, while his eyes dwelt on her, she had never seemed so fresh and attractive.

"Say, listen, Queenie," he said with an unexpected huskiness in his voice. "I'm going to show these here people around over the grounds. You can go with me, can't you? They all know

you; it 'd be kind of nice," he appealed.

As Queenie hesitated she did not suspect the turmoil which was going on under that placid bosom, that curious aching eagerness in his heart.

Queenie's eyes moved over to Chic.

"I think I'd like to stay here," she said.

"It won't take long, Queenie. They'd consider it an honor."

"I don't think I can now, Mr. Zimmerman."

Zimmerman stood hesitating a moment, then walked away. And in the expression of his body he tried to show that he did not care. But his colored sun helmet did not seem so jaunty, the cane did not dangle from its leather loop so dashingly, and there was not that fierce plowing movement of his shoulders; he seemed an old man.

Suddenly his shoulders squared, the cane began to dangle buoyantly, again he was himself. There was a hubbub of voices.

"All ready, follow the leader," he said to the guests in an effort at playfulness, and then moved off with the chattering people about him.

It was a magic afternoon and evening. The top whirled and spun, and the lady continued to scream. The first nervousness which possessed Chic was gone, and happy exaltation was his as he saw the crowd waiting in line to spend their money. Oh, pleasant sight, indeed!

One of the persons who came to congratulate him was Mme. Murta. Mme. Murta was now married. The loneliness of the life was too much for her—this feeling that she was always a freak, that no one was interested in her *personally*—and the aloof, intellectual woman, to the surprise of Coney Island, had married Joe, the platform man.

Joe did not have his jobs so long now; he had begun, as he said, "to take it easy." Sometimes he was out of a job altogether; then he became a professional checker player at one of the booths where the public could match their wits with the players at ten cents a game; free, if they won. Also they could try their hand at chess. But Joe had never quite got the hang of chess.

"Checkers is my game," he would say. "Now that is a game for you!" he would declare, and, hauling at his pipe, he would tell about it.

Around Mme. Murta's neck, and partly covering her face, was a scarf which she always wore in public, and now, unobserved by the people, she stood beside Chic and Queenie, watching the spinning top. She spoke to Chic.

"Maybe some time you weel have the top in Budapest. I weel give you a letter to my friends, because I haf some great friends there—not like t'ese," and she waved her hand in disdain at the monkeys about her. "What do they know?—not'ing. What languages can they speak?—maybe two. And t'en they must stare at my beard. Pff!

"I t'ink eet ees wonderful," she added, as she gazed up at the gayly whirling top with its shrieking cargo.

She sidled closer to Chic, her voice lowered.

"I see Mr. Zimmerman yoost now, and I tell you, Mr. Cotton, he is sad, very sad. It ees bad. It makes people desperate. I know—I feel that way myself sometimes."

Joe, her husband, appeared, and abruptly she ceased speaking. Mme. Murta had been able to get him to wear a collar since their marriage, and in it was a decrepit tie, but otherwise he

was as Chic had seen him the night of the party over the wax works. That small, peaked face; that thin, scraggly mustache, the vile pipe.

"Hullo, everybody," he called, taking his pipe from his mouth and including them all in its sweep. "Your top's quite an idea. Well, you beat me to it, Chic. I been workin' on an idea of my own a good deal like it; but now I got to give it up, I guess. I've had lots of good ideas in my time, and if things 'd just of gone a little different I'd made a lot of money on 'em, too."

Pausing, he tamped the tobacco into the bowl with the end of a blackened, charred finger. *Suck-suck-puff-puff.*

He turned to Mme. Murta, his tone changed.

"Well, we better get along, old woman. We got to eat supper. I want to get back to my checker game. A lot of suckers are playing this evening. I'm going to make a lot of money to-day. Come on, Murt."

He started away, slightly ahead.

Mme. Murta hesitated a moment as if struggling to make up her mind to go in another direction; a sigh escaped her, a look of desperation flashed across her face, and then she followed him.

Once she turned and looked back appealingly, but Chic, lost in fresh wonder over the top, did not see her.

CHAPTER XLI

THE END OF A DREAM



IT was nine o'clock that night when the accident happened. Chic had grown tired of watching the people piling into and out of the top, however pleasant the sight might be, and had taken Queenie and gone to Feltman's. They had dined

slowly and well, and had started to stroll back when the catastrophe took place with such terrifying suddenness.

They had gone through the pass gate and were picking their way through the crowd, when suddenly Chic stopped. He seemed paralyzed, unable to move, or even to think. For as his eyes rested on the gayly whirling top, it gave a curious, humorous little jiggle, which wasn't humorous at all, leaned crazily to one side—there was a sharp, terrifying crack, a moment's silence more devastating than the noise.

Then cries and shrieks!

He felt himself running, and yet his feet seemed leaden. Even in this moment, as the top lurched crazily toward the ground, a calm part of him told what the trouble was. The weight had been too great and the axis had snapped.

Terrible moments went by. Those outside in the street fought to get in, and those on the inside fought to get out. In the confusion some fool turned in a fire alarm, and soon the street was filled with engines adding to the din. Ambulances appeared, police. In the bewildering confusion Chic's eyes rested on one ironical bit of peace and calmness. It was the flag he had once been so proud of—the "Giant Top," it said.

In the confusion Zimmerman appeared, and it was as if a general had come upon a scene of rout and disaster. He gave commands, he sent people here, held them back there, and gradually restored order.

At last it was over; the ambulances were gone, the police had the crowds under control. And now, in this moment, Chic saw Zimmerman coming toward him. His sun helmet was gone, his hair was tossed, his clothes were torn and disheveled.

"Where were you when this happened?"

"I—I was just coming back from getting something to eat."

"Was Queenie with you?"

"Yes, sir."

"I thought I told you to stay here and watch things."

Chic moved uneasily. Yes, sir, he had. But he had thought it would take only a few minutes.

Zimmerman waved it aside.

"Of course you know what's caused this—overload."

His hand reached out in the gesture that Chic knew so well and tapped him on the shoulder.

"And you're the one that let it fill over safety. You're the one who killed them people—I guess you know what that means."

As Chic looked into the cold, relentless eyes he realized the position in which Zimmerman now had him. He alone would be found accountable for the disaster. There would be suits, prosecution. The ride builder held him in the hollow of one hand.

Zimmerman stood a moment, his eyes moving over the young man, his lips set in cruel hard lines.

"I want to see you at the office," he said. "We've got some things to settle."

Turning, he started for the Dragon's Gorge. Chic hesitated a moment, and then followed the squat, bareheaded, slowly-moving man.

CHAPTER XLII

CHIC DEFIES FATE



VEN in the terrible confusion of the wrecking of the top, the picture remained clear to Chic of the heroic part that Zimmerman had played in the work of rescue. Zim-

merman was no longer a slow, deliberate man, but moved with amazing quickness for one so squat and heavy-shouldered. Sometimes it seemed almost as if he were in two places at once.

Chic saw the terrified people charge in from the street, stared at the surging crowds, and heard the pitiful cries of the wounded. At first the crowd had been lashed to a fury by what had happened, but now it stood silently watching the victims as they were carried out.

Chic saw a knot of people gathered at one place in the wreckage, and it was as if it were a knot of bees in a swarm, all dark and intent and moving and buzzing within themselves.

As Chic drew closer he found that a man had been pinned underneath the wreckage, and in the cramped, narrow space it was impossible for the rescuers to free him from the weight which was slowly crushing him to death. The agony on the man's face, the pitiful pleading look in the man's eyes, sent a shudder down Chic's spine.

"Oh, God, God, do something," begged the man.

There was a movement as Zimmerman came through the crowd, picking his way over the twisted and bent beams. Slowly, almost deliberately, he walked around the pinioned man, and then Chic saw Zimmerman climb into the little pit where the others had struggled at the beams. Taking off his coat, Zimmerman wadded it into a pad, placed it across his shoulders, and then, getting down on his hands and knees, he braced his mighty back against a beam.

Never would Chic forget that face as Zimmerman struggled at the weight—those square iron jaws, the horn-rimmed glasses, the thick, broad, ani-

mal like nose. Now his eyes took on a set, unseeing stare, the veins stood out on his forehead, his nostrils moved. He was Jean Valjean under the ox-cart.

But the weight was too great, and, instead of lifting, began to settle. A terrified, helpless feeling leaped through Chic—what if Zimmerman should be killed?

And then the great weight began to rise, slowly and unsteadily, but surely. It was off; suddenly the man's groans ceased, hands drew him out, now he was being carried down the wreckage.

Zimmerman slowly rose from the pit and sat dazedly on one of the cross beams, his great gorilla-like chest rising and falling, the cords on his forehead and temples still throbbing.

Hands reached out to help him, but he waved them aside.

"Go ahead gettin' the others out, I'm all right."

Chic felt the heroism of it, and suddenly he saw Zimmerman in a light that he had never before seen him in. But there were other things to do; other unfortunates to rescue. Putting on his torn and wrinkled coat, Zimmerman began to pick his way over the twisted beams.

As Chic saw Zimmerman moving among the frightened, terrified people, bringing a semblance of order out of chaos, his respect for him increased. After all, Zimmerman was a hero—not a pleasant, glorified, story-book hero—but still a hero.

From somewhere Zimmerman had got a megaphone and had climbed up on the twisted steel of the top and was directing the rescue. But now, as he applied the megaphone to his lips, his voice was not slow and deliberate, but was sharp, clear, vibrant with authority.

As the feverish work went on, a decrepit-looking skulker, half beggar, half thief, managed to crawl through the fence which separated the top from the street, and, taking advantage of the confusion, crept toward one of the unconscious victims and began to rifle his pockets.

Like a flash, Zimmerman was down from the wreckage, and with amazing speed dashed across the open space. His fist shot out, there was the sound of a sharp impact; the man swayed back and forth uncertainly, then crumpled up. There he lay a moment, and then, half whining, half snarling, rose to his knees.

"Get t' hell out of here!" Zimmerman thundered.

The thief hesitated a moment, looking up into Zimmerman's iron face. Evidently saw something in it he did not like, for he crept off and disappeared into the crowd. Zimmerman walked back across the open space and again mounted the wreckage. The megaphone went to his lips, once more he was the captain on the bridge.

Now that work of rescue was over, and the last ambulance had gone, guards had been placed to keep out the curious.

As Zimmerman walked along toward the grotesque outlines of the Dragon's Gorge, he had his first opportunity to think of Chic. Cotton had brought all this about, his neglect had caused the catastrophe; suddenly and unexpectedly Cotton was brought into his power. Now Zimmerman could have his revenge!

At first it was not a very dominant thought—just a flash of possibility across his mind—then it grew stronger. Other plans that he had been maturing were no longer needed.

There would be an investigation,

some one would be arrested and held accountable, and Zimmerman knew that the blame could be placed on Chic. It was a plain neglect of duty; he had instructed him to watch the top, and, above all, not to overload it.

And what had Chic done? He had gone off to dinner with Queenie. With Queenie! Yes, slipped away as he was always doing. Well, he wouldn't do it again.

Slowly and heavily Chic walked beside him, as if drugged by the scenes that he had just witnessed. But his mind was not on Zimmerman, nor on Queenie. It still moved among the scenes which had just unfolded themselves before his eyes. And in his heart was an ache such as he had never known before.

As suddenly and as completely as the pricking of one of the Coney Island toy balloons, his dream had burst. All his hope and planning!

He knew now that the park owners and amusement managers would never again have confidence in his top. The axis might be built stronger so that it would support all the great weight which it must carry, but that which had happened to-night could never be forgotten. No park manager would ever put in an order for a Giant Top.

Almost as depressed and saddened as Chic was Queenie. Her usual nonchalance was gone, and she was strangely subdued. She lived in a world of tight wire exploits, high diving, feats of hazard and chance; she herself might at any time make a false step on her wire; her own parents had been killed in a circus blow-down; but the suddenness and unusualness of the accident she had just witnessed was too much for her.

As she walked along toward the Dragon's Gorge she took Chic's arm.

He was in trouble; she must comfort him. Zimmerman saw the almost unconscious movement, and now hurried his step.

At the door of the outer office, Zimmerman drew out a leather wallet of keys, selected one, *clk* it went.

"Queenie, I want you to wait out here a bit. You, too, Katz," he said more sharply. "I got some things I want to talk over with Cotton. Come in, Cotton."

Chic looked about him in this inner half office, half studio, part museum where he had come to talk to Zimmerman that first time. How indelibly that scene was stamped on his mind—the great, long, rough pine architect's table strewn with a litter of blue prints and sketches; the *papier-mâché* faces and masks on the walls; the *papier-mâché* dragon sprawled across his desk.

But now the shriveled balloons were gone, the little motion picture village was missing, but in their places were tiny reproductions of new plans and ambitions—miniature rides and roller coasters and Tunnels of Love—that weird phantasmagoria which poured so ceaselessly through the builder's mind.

"Set down."

Chic's ear weighed the gruff tone in astonishment. Why was Mr. Zimmerman so cross? This was strange, for the two were in trouble, and must stick together.

"You went off to supper with Queenie when I told you to stay with the top, didn't you?"

Chic hesitated. Y-yes, he had done that, but—

Zimmerman waved it aside. He had done it, hadn't he?—that was what he wanted to know.

"Yes, sir."

Zimmerman paused in his walking

up and down, and, planting his threatening weight before Chic, rested his hypnotic eyes upon him.

Hadn't he told him to lay off Queenie? Did he remember a certain little beating he had got one evening a while back? Well, that wasn't anything in comparison to what was going to happen to him if he kept on hanging around Queenie.

"Oh, I don't know about that," Chic heard himself say. "I think I can take care of myself."

Zimmerman gave a short, animal-like laugh.

"You won't have to take care of yourself. Somebody 'll do that for you. You'll be in jail."

Chic heard the terrible word. *Jail!* What did Zimmerman mean by that?

"How do you make that out?"

Zimmerman came closer.

"Not a very pleasant word, is it? 'Ain't got much music in it, has it? How do I make it out?—criminal carelessness, that's how I make it out. The top is in your name, remember that. I merely built it for you. And then, this afternoon, when I told you to watch it, you went off and left it."

Chic knew that what Zimmerman said was in substance true. There would be legal complications and tangles, but even in this confused state Chic realized that the chances were all with Zimmerman.

Bending forward, Zimmerman tapped Chic on the shoulder with his finger, rapidly and nervously, not slowly and heavily as he had done that day at "the plant."

"Are you going to pass Queenie up or not? I'm askin' you for the last time."

Chic had the feeling of the room swirling around him, while he stared into the slitted, unblinking eyes.

What should he tell him? And now it was not a matter at all of giving up Queenie, but one of will pitted against will.

Aloud he heard himself say:

"I won't give her up, and you can't make me."

Zimmerman stood a moment, as if not rightly hearing, and then a narrow, knifelike slit opened in his lips.

"That's your final decision, is it?"

"Yes."

"You're sure?"

"Yes."

"Don't make no hasty decision."

"I'm not," answered Chic slowly.

There was a moment's silence, while the two faced each other—slender, fair, blue-eyed Chic seated on the high stool; dark, swarthy Zimmerman bulked before him. In this moment of silence they both became conscious of a sharp rapping at the door. They had heard it before, but so intense were they that they had paid no heed to it. And now it came, more insistent than ever, more ominous.

Zimmerman did not lift his eyes from Chic, nor look in the direction of the door.

"Who is it?"

"It's me, Mr. Zimmerman," came Abie-Katz's voice.

"What you want?"

"I must see you, Mr. Zimmerman. It's important."

"Come in."

Concern and agitation were written on Abie's narrow, sharp, bespectacled features.

"The reporters are here, Mr. Zimmerman. I've been trying to hold them back, but I can't. You've got to make some kind of statement to them."

The reporters! Reporters meant something to Zimmerman. All his life he had played upon them as a great or-

ganist plays upon his stops. Sometimes Zimmerman took the reporters into his confidence and caressed them, and sometimes he tossed a tempting mystery before them and let them sniff it, but always was he able to produce sweet music.

And in this same moment Zimmerman realized they could be used in another way. He would place the blame on Cotton. All he would have to do would be to tell the story. Cotton couldn't deny it. The papers would do the rest. The next day, or possibly that night, the police would come.

CHAPTER XLIII

KEEPING FAITH WITH THE PUBLIC

GOOD evening, Mr. Zimmerman," the reporters said respectfully as they came in. "How about this mix-up? What went wrong, anyway?"

"Set down, fellas," he said with the display of warmth he always had for these powerful myrmidons. Then in a cold, impersonal way implying reproof, which he always had for Abie Katz, he continued:

"My God! Katz, can't you find them a seat?"

He paused, after the greeting and after the men had been seated, while his eyes moved over them.

"Yes, men, I'll tell you about it. You know I've never tried to put anything over on you"—he paused and corrected himself—"that is, on a serious story. You know that."

The men did.

"Well, I ain't going to hold out on you to-night. It's a bad fix we're in, and I ain't goin' to try to whitewash it."

His fingers rose and fell silently on

the table, like a pianist's, after the manner of his own, as he turned it over in his mind. And slowly his eyes swung around to Chic. The time had come, indeed.

Word spread that the reporters had arrived, and now the people whose fortunes were bound up with Zimmerman's waited to see what would be the outcome. Many of them were the guests he had entertained to-day; others were members of the N.A.A.P., and had heard him at the convention deliver his "Brothers or Boobs" speech.

Zimmerman hesitated, and it was as if in one hand he held Chic and all that Chic meant—the giving up of Queenie, the revenge he could now reap—and in the other was the ideal he had cherished so long, better treatment of the public.

And as he sat silently in his chair before his desk, his hair tossed, his clothes torn and disheveled and here and there spotted with blood, a struggle went on in his mind, the fiercest and most bitter he had ever known.

But of course Chic, nor Queenie, nor any of the reporters saw it. They saw only a thick, heavy-set man sitting before a littered desk getting ready to make a statement.

It was not easy, but in that moment, as he sat there, Zimmerman made up his mind.

"Yes, I'll tell you, men," he began. "I—I'm going to tell you, because I think the public is entitled to know. I assume full responsibility, you can tell 'em that. I ain't goin' to do no pussy-footin'. The idea of the top was wrong—the axis couldn't carry the load—"

At last he was through; he was answering the reporters' questions. Now the reporters were leaving; to-morrow it would be on the front pages.

There was a little scene worth recording among the gentlemen of the press as they walked into the dim park with the wreckage of the top looming before them.

"I thought at first, the way he started off, that maybe he was going to hand out an alibi," said one of them. "But he didn't. The old boy certainly came clean. You've got to hand it to him."

Zimmerman had told it all directly, even though each sentence drove the wedge deeper between him and Queenie. And he told it through no love of Chic, but because of his belief in the doctrine he had preached so long.

And now in this wait his eyes moved over Queenie appealingly, and catching them, she smiled back.

"I think it was wonderful the way you acted this evening, Mr. Zimmerman," she said.

His heart gave a little bound. Did she suspect something of what he had done?

"Out there at the top," she continued, "the way you got down under it and lifted that terrible weight. It certainly made me hold my breath."

"That wasn't anything," he said slowly.

Queenie gave the little laugh of one who knows better.

"Yes, it was, Mr. Zimmerman. Nobody else on the Island could of done it."

It was now late, time to start home. There would be many things to do tomorrow, the sensation in the papers, the police, the investigation. Slowly Zimmerman rose from his desk, for now was gone the amazing energy he had put into the rescue of the victims, and as he followed Queenie and Chic to the door he felt a touch of weariness.

Coney Island was asleep, a deep,

heavy, complete, childish sleep. The roller coasters had been stilled, the revolving lights no longer turned, pale, ghostly boats were poised at the top of the shoot-the-chutes, a night watchman was poking his way about with a flash light. In the silence there was a sharp hissing, a heavy rushing roar; the water in the swimming tank was being changed.

CHAPTER XLIV

RENUNCIATION



CHIC was stunned by what had happened, and during the days that followed he went about in almost as much of a daze as he had the night of the catastrophe. He saw his name in the papers, saw pictures of the tangled wreck; police officers came to see him, representatives of the insurance companies, relatives of those who had been injured came demanding money; people he had never heard of before wrote him letters and tried to get him on the telephone.

A crop of girls, seeing his picture in the papers, made the great discovery that he needed a warm friend in his trouble, and would gladly be same.

The quizzings at the police station were the worst. There had just been a change in the police administration, and the new broom was very busy indeed. But Zimmerman, in his talk with the reporters the night of the accident, had assumed full responsibility, and now the newspapers could not raise the cry for prosecution which usually accompanies such a catastrophe.

During the following days it was found that the catastrophe had not been as serious as it had seemed that night in the bewildering confusion of

the crash. There had been screams and cries, but they had been more from terror than from pain. The ambulances had arrived, and the wounded had been rushed to the hospitals; an emigrant woman had been killed, many persons had been injured, but now it was found that the injuries would not be fatal. Mostly the people had been tossed about and frightened rather than injured.

There would be a string of law suits; these suits would run on for some time, but all amusement devices are insured against just such a possibility, and now the insurance company took over the claims.

After the first numbing effect Chic, strangely enough, wasn't depressed as much as might be supposed. It was a blow that his mother's money had been lost, a blow that the top was a failure, but the pain was not as personal and as poignant as when he had upset the Swiss chalet. That had been his own fault, his own awkwardness, but the disaster of the top was beyond his own power.

If Chic had been an old man he would have been overwhelmed, but he was young and elastic.

"I can do what I *will* to do."

He would start in and build himself up again, but it would not be in amusement park inventions. More and more he was becoming interested in radio. He had carried out a few simple experiments, and the more he worked on them the more possibilities he saw in this field.

As the days went by, and as his mind cleared after the catastrophe, he began to look upon Zimmerman as a hero. It was not only for the way he had taken command that night and brought order out of confusion, but the thought of Zimmerman deliberately taking the re-

sponsibility of the accident, although it had cut him off from Queenie, whom they both loved.

"I'm going to do the square thing by him," Chic said at last to himself.

Once his mind was made up it wasn't so difficult. An evening or two later Chic went to the office in the Dragon's Gorge to announce his decision.

Zimmerman sat before his desk, his great arms spread out motionlessly across its top, looking unblinkingly at Chic. And then simply and briefly Chic told him that he would give up Queenie. There must be some trick in it, a catch somewhere, Zimmerman's manner said. Give up Queenie? No one would do that so easily.

"You mean you'll break it off with her so as to give me a chance?"

"Yes."

"Give her up altogether?"

"Yes."

Zimmerman looked at him steadily a moment.

"Why are you willing to do that?"

Chic hesitated. It was not so readily put into words. Well, for one thing it was the way Zimmerman had acted the night of the disaster. It was a wonderful thing, Chic said, for Zimmerman to do what he had done. Zimmerman waved it aside; it wasn't anything.

"I guess you've found somebody you want more," he said slowly, again filled with suspicion.

"No, I haven't, Mr. Zimmerman."

"You mean you'll pass her up and give me a chance when you ain't got your eye on somebody else?"

"Yes."

At last Zimmerman was convinced, and in his heart was a glowing coal of gratitude. And now he wished to do something to show his appreciation. But Zimmerman had never been one

to show his emotions easily; and still that glowing warmth grew and grew. Abruptly from his pocket he drew his leather cigar case.

"Have a smoke, Cotton," he said in the only gesture of friendliness that he knew. "I think maybe you'll like these. I switched brands last week, and I think these are a lot better." He extended the deadly missiles. "Here, I'll give you a light." From his pocket he brought out the gold lighter which the Hawaiian Show had given him. "There, you got it. I think you're going to like that cigar. It looks kinda strong, but it really ain't."

Zimmerman arose, and in him was a great — an almost trembling eagerness to put into concrete expression what his words had been fumbling at.

"Looky here, I'll tell you what I am going to do for you. I think you're just the fella who would appreciate this sort of thing."

From the wall he took the Barnum circus handbill which hung in its long glass frame. Tenderly, almost lovingly, he took the faded old poster, ornamented at the top with a woodcut of an elephant dragging a plow, and from his hip pocket he brought a flaming handkerchief and wiped off the frame.

"It's the first Barnum souvenir I ever got. It cost me quite a lot, or it seemed like it then. You see this here, Cotton—it's Barnum's real autograph, signed by himself," he continued, with a faint shadow of a choking exaltation in his voice, as he pointed to a pale signature at the bottom of the yellow bill.

"This here picture is of Jumbo, when he used him at Bridgeport to plow with. He used to have a man dressed up like a Hindu plowing with him in a field where everybody could see them from the train."

Zimmerman gave a little chuckling laugh.

"It sure made people stare. Of course they didn't know the Hindu had instructions to plow only at train time. Why, farmers used to write in from all over the country asking Mr. Barnum if it saved him money to plow with an elephant."

Zimmerman's laugh rose at the delicious absurdity of it.

"Oh, he was a real showman, Barnum was! The rest of us are just cheap Woolworth imitations. You take it, Cotton, and keep it. You're welcome to it," he repeated. "It's yours."

As they started to walk through the deserted street together, Chic thought of the night when Queenie had looked out the window in her rooms over the wax works and had said that this was the hour she liked Coney Island best.

At that time it had seemed far-fetched fill-in talk, but now that he knew Coney Island better, and its mystery and fascination had grown on him, he quite understood what she meant.

The monkeys had gone home, crowds no longer pushed and shoved, the roar of the roller coaster had been stilled, and peace and contentment lay over the gaudy, pathetic, gay little world.

The shutters had gone up on the long line of concession booths, the garish lights of the photographic studios had been turned off, the cardboard airplane in which lovers sat and had their pictures taken had been wheeled inside, while a few steps farther along a peanut roaster sat on the sidewalk chained to its wall, its lid tied open, revealing a brassy emptiness so that no late prowler would have his hopes dashed.

Did he want to spend his life in Coney Island? Chic didn't know. It was fascinating, it carried a spell, but in many ways it was cheap, it was tinsel, its values were not real values.

Surely in the world there was something better and finer than Coney Island; people who measured life by a different standard. He thought of Charmian, and a poignant memory shot through him. Charmian moved in a different world, a finer and somehow bigger world than the one at Coney Island.

"Kind of interesting this time of night, don't you think so, Mr. Zimmerman?"

"Yes, kind of. Looks like it was going to be a good drawing day tomorrow."

And Chic had no way of knowing the elation that was pounding in Zimmerman's heart. Queenie! He was to have Queenie! But, of course, it would have to be done subtly. Cotton would have to break off from her gradually, and then Queenie's interest would have to be won over to himself.

"I guess we better step along. I'm getting so that I'd like to be chummy with a steak, as Queenie says. She has good expressions, hasn't she?"

"Yes," agreed Chic with a curious little tremble in his voice.

The two men continued down the deserted street.

CHAPTER XLV

CHIC PLAYS THE GAME



SUDDENLY the street was no longer deserted, for before them was the glowing welcome of the Dog Wagon. But now there issued from it no chatter of voices, no clash of dishes; instead there issued

amazingly from it the strains of music.

And the people, instead of being seated decorously along the counter on the high stools, or at the narrow side tables, were bending over some one in the middle who was evidently doing something very entertaining, indeed, while all the time the joyful tootings of a saxophone filled the wagon.

In the middle of the knot of fascinated people was Queenie, and before her was Glenna, the daughter of Elfa, the Elephant Skinned Girl, and to Chic's astonishment Queenie was putting on a weird and fantastic dance with bread rolls.

A little Coney Island tragedy had happened, and jealousy was at the base of it. Elfa's secret had been given away. The Natural Albino, whose son must travel with her, had told Glenna that her "aunt," instead of being a grand and glorious lady, was really her mother—a side-show freak.

Glenna had sat quietly; it was too preposterous to understand. It was one of the jokes that grown people sometimes made.

"Oh, it's true all right," the Natural Albino flung at her.

"It isn't, is it, auntie?"

Elfa would never forget that terrible moment; the stunned look in Glenna's eyes, the pathetic appeal in her voice. Elfa had told Queenie what had happened, and Queenie had thought it over.

"Bring her out here to see us," she had instructed Elfa, and when Elfa had brought the child to Coney Island, Queenie had said: "Why, we're awfully nice people out here; we have lots of fun and good times," and she had started in to prove it to the child.

She had taken Glenna to watch her dance on the wire, she had taken her to ride on the roller coasters, to the

fun houses and walk-through shows, and gradually the shock had worn off. After all, side show people were not so bad.

And now, to-night, Queenie was giving a little entertainment all of her own for Glenna. She had taken two bread rolls, put forks into them for legs, wrapped a napkin around her hand, put a face and eyes on it with her lip stick, and was now cleverly manipulating the manikin into a dance. Frozo had come with his saxophone and was furnishing enough music for an outdoor dance hall.

Chic paused and looked in amazement, for under Queenie's skillful and clever management the figure took on a personality. It wasn't merely a couple of bread rolls and a napkin, but a curious eccentric gnome—a frolicsome, delightful, preposterous gnome, dancing gayly up and down the counter, bowing, curtsying, kicking its great feet over its tiny head. As Chic watched the fascinated dance he felt an admiration for Queenie. It was a fine and generous thing she had done for Glenna.

"How do you do that?" asked the fascinated Glenna.

"You come back to-morrow and I'll show you," said Queenie. "That's only one of the wonderful things you can learn here in Coney Island, isn't that right, people?"

A chorus answered that it was. Others had volunteered to entertain the little girl who had just learned that her mother was a side show freak—the merry party continued.

One of those present was Mme. Murta. She had come silently in and had sat down aloofly at the counter, with her book at her side. But on her face was a look of sadness and dejection. Since she had married Joe, the

platform man, she had become more silent and aloof than ever, and more and more often she went about with a book in her hand. Sometimes she sat looking at it without turning a leaf.

A scarf was drawn about Mme. Murta's face, as she always wore it except when she was on the platform, but Glenna's quick eyes detected the beard, and she looked at it with a strange mingling of awe and fright.

"Don't be afraid of it, leetle girl," said Mme. Murta. "Give me your handt, see"—a note of defiance crept into her voice—"it is not so bad. It is soft and silky. Ledt it come through your fingers, *so*. I hope you'll like me," she appealed, "because"—here there was a half stifled catch in her voice—"I never had a little girl of my own."

The aloof, intellectual Mme. Murta was trying to make friends with the big-eyed little girl, who kept so resistlessly withdrawing.

The woman shrank at hearing a step outside the Dog Wagon, and a figure appeared in the door. It was Joe, her husband, and about him there was still that unkempt, shiftless look.

"Say, Murt, I wanna ask you something. You got a minute?"

From his mouth he took an evil pipe, and with the back of his hand made a brief, ineffectual motion at his thin, drooping, coffee-stained mustache as if to brush it in a characteristic gesture of his. And sometimes, as he talked, Joe would take hold of his nostril and jiggle it noisily back and forth.

"Just for a minute, Murt," he urged.

Mme. Murta's face clouded, and a crushed, helpless look came into it. Slowly she got up and went to the futile little man standing just outside the door. He wanted the borrow of a

quarter. Things hadn't gone well that day with him, he said; hadn't had good luck at all with his checker games; the boss had promised him some money after the blow-off, but he couldn't find him—reckoned he'd got in a pitch game or something—and now Joe wanted to get some smokin' tobacco before everything was locked up for the night.

Mme. Murta took a quarter out of her purse.

"Thanks, Murt, I knowed you would. I'll give it back to you tomorrow. I'll be over to the boarding house soon's I've had a smoke."

The little man turned and shuffled off into the night.

Mme. Murta now went back to her lone place at the counter, for Glenna did not want her, but instead of picking up her book and losing herself in it as she usually did, she sat dreamily looking at the little blue-eyed Glenna.

That which Chic now had to do was not easy. A feeling of regard for Queenie had grown up in him. When he had first met her she had been a person of alluring mystery, but now, although that first mystery had passed, she was still fascinating.

While she was not exactly pretty, she was striking—"cute" was a word that might have been applied to her. She was a slangy, vivid, unforgettable, rough-and-ready personality. Sometimes Queenie was boisterous, she could give and take, but in Queenie was a warm heart. She was, in her own way, the good angel of Coney Island. She was never too busy to help a friend, or any of the people of her own world. Chic had just seen an example of it in what she had done for Glenna.

The little scene that Chic had just witnessed touched him. The picture

remained vividly before him of Queenie doing the grotesque dance with the bread rolls, while Glenna's eyes glowed with delight. And Chic could see the utter thankfulness in Elfa's eyes as she looked across at Queenie. It was as if after all these years a daughter had been suddenly given to Elfa.

As Chic had come in, Queenie's eyes had rested on him eagerly, and the bread roll dance had grown more spirited; but he must show her that she meant nothing to him. A poignant bitterness shot through him, but he must carry it out in spite of the crying in his heart. He became an actor.

Yes, the bread roll dance was all right, his manner said. Very interesting, indeed, but it was kid stuff. When Queenie raised her eyes to meet his, he moved his away impersonally. He even sat down at the counter, ordered something to eat and stuffed it into his mouth.

"Isn't Glenna a darling?" she managed to whisper to him.

"Sure, she is," he replied casually.

But there was no such acting on the part of Zimmerman. He was no longer the silent, aloof King of Coney Island, sitting, as he so often did, at the counter, eating and paying not the slightest attention to any one.

Instead, he hovered over Queenie, his eyes eagerly upon her. And he became almost talkative—the first time any of the performers except Queenie had ever seen him in such a prodigal mood. The amazing man even held Glenna on his lap and amused her with one of his pet stories.

It was now time for Glenna to go and Elfa arose. It had been an exciting evening for the child, and now as she was ready to start Zimmerman held out his hand.

"Tell me good-by, little girl," he said.

Glenna put her tiny hand into his paw, she made a curtsy, and then stared at a folded green paper which Zimmerman had managed to leave in her hand.

"Oh, au-mamma, what's this?" she piped.

Zimmerman had wanted to do something for the little girl, and he had spoken in the language he knew by placing in her hand a crisp new ten-dollar bill.

Moved by this act of kindness on the part of Zimmerman, Elfa tried to grasp his hand in appreciation, but Zimmerman waved her wordlessly aside as if to say, "It's all right; don't mention it."

"Good-by, ever'body; thank you for the nice time," said Glenna. Now she became the little child again, and made a curtsy, as she had been taught at school, and then, taking her mother's hand, disappeared into the night.

It grew late, one by one the performers began to go, until only Zimmerman and Queenie and a couple of others remained. Zimmerman now hovered about Queenie, not saying much, but with a lightness of heart that he had not known in a long time.

Chic engaged himself in conversation with Frozo about something or other, he was not quite sure what, and talked heatedly on the subject.

"You're right, Frozo," he said once, putting his hand on Frozo's shoulder. "You're absolutely right."

It was easy for Frozo to agree with this.

Now he must go, walk out and leave Queenie. He knew when he was gone that Zimmerman would accompany her to the hotel, and he would see her


again, and bit by bit Queenie would be won over.

"I've got to be traveling," Chic said. "Yes, got to jump," he repeated. "Got a lot of things to do to-morrow. Good night, everybody."

And then he went out. He had made the first step.

CHAPTER XLVI

THE FUTILITY OF LIFE

 HE days to Chic were now even more lonesome and depressing than when he had first come to New York. Everything had happened so suddenly that he was bewildered.

He thought of going back to Junction City and starting all over again—life would be easier there—and then the motto which he had chosen for himself came to his mind and courage returned. No, he would remain in New York and succeed.

It was hard to give up Queenie. He had formed a liking for the slangy, good-hearted, superstitious wire walker. She did not fill the secret ideal of a girl which he cherished in his heart, but Queenie was good company. Her intellectual interests were not very profound. When he had first met her she had asked Chic to recommend some books to her, and he had, but soon her interest in them waned. She went back to her tabloid newspapers.

"They've got everything in them, and they're easy to read," she said.

Coney Island was her life, it would always be, and although Chic was beginning to see Coney in less glamorous terms than when he had first come there, he could understand the fascination it had for her.

When he saw her he kept up the

pretense that he was not interested. Queenie could not quite understand it, and the hurt looks she gave Chic pierced his heart.

But soon her pride rose. Who was she, the best wire walker in America, to let him act that way? No, indeed, he couldn't high-hat her. That pained worst of all, but it must be done.

A subtle change had come over Zimmerman. He was no longer moody; in fact, he was almost genial. He became more talkative and no longer stalked through the streets of Coney Island, barely speaking to the performers and concessionaires, but stopped to exchange pleasant words with them. He began to sleep better, wasn't so nervous, he said.

There came a rainy stretch of weather, and there is nothing quite so utterly depressing to the denizens of Coney Island as rain, especially rain on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays. These usually cheerful people then stand around gloomily and drably, like wet hens in a chicken yard, now and then giving a very dismal cluck, indeed. But Zimmerman was not cast down at all. The weather made no difference to him; the boardwalk could be as deserted as the Gobi Desert for all he seemed to care.

"Now's the time to buckle down and get things done," he said. "If you're going to let a few days of rainy weather lick you, then you're no showman. You ought to get a job in a nice inclosed department store with a roof over it."

Zimmerman's work went forward as it had not gone in a long time. He had the wreck cleared away, and in its place a cheerful and bizarre fun house rose—"got to make the space pay its way," he said. And now his mind was again filled with creative planning.

One afternoon Chic went to Coney Island to take a swim, and started down the street in the direction of the bath house. His experienced eye could read at a glance comparatively how many people were in Coney Island today; how successfully the ballys were turning the monkeys into the grind shows; if the rides were doing a repeat business; if the rabbit games had a line of people in front of them, or if the operators strained their throats in vain.

He cast his eye professionally over a pit show. A new Hindu snake handler was being tried out. At the bottom of the pit sat the bearded man with a turban around his head and with a snake in his lap. For fifty cents he would let the snake bite him on the hand; if the crowd would take up a collection of a dollar he would let the snake bite him on the tongue.

Chic turned away with a feeling of nausea, and as he wove his way along the street he was impressed with the tawdriness of the place as he had never been before. He saw the cheap "slum," the bisque dolls, and the worthless presents for which the public paid so much money. This same cheap, garish, gaudy spirit was over most of the Island.

When he had first come to Coney, Chic had seen only the surface, but now that he understood it better he realized how cheap it was. There were bigger things in life than this island of illusion. It had been a phase, and a very interesting one, but soon he would pass on to something more substantial.

Chic changed into a bathing suit, slipped the rubber cord with the key over his wrist, and picked his way along the squirming beach. A pang of regret shot through him, as it was here that he had come that day with

Queenie when they had played beach ball. He could visualize her as she had stood that day, gracefully tossing the gayly colored ball. After their swim they had gone to Feltman's, where they had had their first intimate talk. But now that was all over.

Queenie's pride rose. "No one can treat me that way," her manner said.

Never had Chic seen Zimmerman so gay and light-hearted. Of course the top had been a terrible flop, but other things were straightening out; it was going to be a good season after all.



The last picture Chic had was of Zimmerman laying out his dream park, and Queenie seemed to have drawn closer to him

Suddenly Chic's heart gave a leap, for before him, on the beach, was Queenie, and with her was Zimmerman. They were playing with a beach ball as he and Queenie had done on that other day. Before Chic could turn away Queenie caught sight of him and paused with the ball held high above her head. She stood a moment, then her arms came down without tossing the ball.

"Oh—"

"Hello," called Chic, inconsequentially.

Chic kept up the pretense that seeing her again was a very casual and passing thing, indeed. He saw her eyes rest on him appealingly, as they had that last night at the Dog Wagon, but he kept up his indifference. And then

"Great place, Coney Island is," he said with a wave of his hand at the beach peppered with people; "greatest little old place in the world. A million people in a day—think of that! Not another place in the world can take care of that many. It's really marvelous."

He paused, lost in thought a moment.

"But this here Coney Island is just a starter. I'd like to draw up the plans for a bigger and finer and higher class Coney, a Coney Island *de luxe*, that's what I mean. Looky here, this is the way I'd lay it out," and with his finger he drew on the sand quick, firm lines—a plan for his dream park.

Queenie was interested. Here was something she could understand.

"I think that's good, Mr. Zimmerman. Why, I think it's fine!"

He raised his eyes appreciatively.

"Do you, Queenie?"

His hand reached out and rested on her shoulder a moment.

"It sort of gives me confidence in myself to hear you say that, Queenie. Strange how somebody believing in you gives you—well, pep, I guess you'd call it. Now here's where I'd have an airplane landing, because the parks of the future have got to think of that," and again his finger moved through the sand.

Chic continued his studied lack of interest in Queenie. At last he rose.

"I've got to go in," he said. "Got to get back to town."

The last picture he had as he walked away was of Zimmerman stretched out on the sand, laying out his dream park, and now Queenie seemed to have drawn closer to him, absorbed in the lines flowing from under his finger.

After Chic had dressed and was walking the streets again, he felt more and more cut off from the life he had known at Coney Island. Instead of continuing where the crowds were thickest, he turned to the right and continued to walk, hardly realizing where he was going.

This took him to the outer confines of Coney Island, into the rooming and boarding house district, where thousands of people spend the summer in small, over-populated rooms, in sound of the merry-go-rounds, the shooting galleries, and the roar of the roller coasters.

The great crowds were behind him, and now the sounds of Coney Island came like the faint roar of waves on the shore. It was like a small, protected section of a river which lies lazily

and dreamily only a short distance from the rush of rapid waters.

Children appeared in the streets and alleys, old people wheeled themselves along the sidewalks, fat, shapeless women came waddling back from the beach, their wet bathing suits covered with sand showing under their bath robes.

Suddenly the quiet was disturbed by one of those strange, bizarre, grotesque events which are so much a part of Coney Island, for Chic heard his name called. For a moment he thought that some child had called it, but that could not be, for he knew no one in this section of Coney Island.

It was Half Pint.

"Chic, wait a minute, something's happened."

Half Pint came hurrying toward him, not running as a child would, but with a quick patter of steps which was still a walk.

"Something's gone wrong," he panted. "It's Mme. Murta, over to her boarding house. I've got to get a policeman."

In a few moments Chic was going up the steps of the freaks' boarding house with Half Pint and an officer. The landlady met them at the door in a flutter of words, determined to show that what had happened was not her fault.

"I tried to open her door and I couldn't," she declared. "It was locked and I couldn't," she repeated.

She had knocked and knocked, she said, because she was suspicious that something was wrong; when she couldn't get in the door she had gone to the kitchen and stood on a chair, and there, across the foot of the bed—

Mme. Murta had come back at noon from the side show. Said she wasn't feeling well and wasn't to be disturbed.

And then the landlady had found the door locked, and had called Half Pint to go for an officer.

Chic felt a shock of horror when the door was broken open and he saw the sight within. A very quiet and peacefully still figure lay across the foot of the cheap, white, iron bed, but for a moment Chic was not sure at all that it was Mme. Murta.

Yes, it was her figure, her clothes, but her face was strangely white. She was dead, but before she had died she had shaved the long brown beard from her face.

Down one side of her mouth was a thin white blister, the width of baby ribbon. Poison. On the table was a note written in her peculiar, closely-formed old-world hand.

"*I couldn't go on,*" it said.

Chic felt a breaking in his heart, not so much that Mme. Murta had been released in this way from Joe, as by the story that her preternaturally white face told. He saw behind it the years of suffering and humiliation she had gone through, while all the time she had kept up the pitiful and somehow noble pretense that she was proud of her beard, of its length and silky softness—and now, when she was to be looked on for the last time she had shaved.

It touched Chic. That to him was the real tragedy of it—the years of living, not this boarding house death.

After a time Joe was brought. He came in, his hat in his hand, his mouth open. He couldn't understand why she had done it, he said. She'd seemed all right that morning; why, she 'peared more cheerful than she had been in quite some time.

Last night she had been busy writin' her folks in Budapest, and she'd taken the letters out to mail them, and then

she'd come back and they'd had a bottle of near beer together, and she'd seemed in fine shape. No, he couldn't understand it.

At last the room was under guard, while waiting for the coroner to come. Soon the reporters would arrive and then the story would be given to the public. But already the word had spread up and down the street, and a little crowd had collected outside the house, eagerly reveling in the sensation. The bearded lady had gone and killed herself, but before she had killed herself she had cut off her beard!

The wits in the crowd got a great deal of amusement out of it. One of them was a fat, greasy-looking, ox-faced man who, as he stood looking up at the room, continued to eat a hot dog. Pausing, he pointed up at the silent room with the toothsome morsel.

"She shaved herself because I guess she was afraid they'd put pants on her and bury her for a man—*heh, heh!*" And as he laughed a flash of gold and mustard showed.

"Maybe it was so they wouldn't charge admission to see her when she couldn't get any money for it," said another wit.

Chic could stand it no longer, and started down the street on his way home. The evening crowds were now arriving; hordes of people were pouring out of the subway trains and rolling along the streets like ocean waves on the shore, all seeking amusement.

Now the sounds of Coney Island rose, the heavy, dull, thunderous roar of the elevated, the sharp, staccato sputter of the shooting galleries, the frantic ceaseless clanging of the mechanical drums of the merry-go-round, and over all this, penetrating it and saturating it, were the haunting, unforgettable smells and odors of Coney.

How typical all this was of Coney Island! The strange, bizarre little tragedy could have happened no place else.

But now, as he squirmed his way through the crowd he felt already as if he had left the Island. Coney was only tinsel, it was not real life; it was a flashy, gaudy playground, it was only a stage in his development.

A leatherlung in a cowboy hat stood before a grind show turning the monkey-keys. At sight of Chic he made a motion for Chic to wait, and in a moment the bally was over.

"Say, I hear Mme. Murta bumped herself off," he said. "Did you hear it?"

The word had flashed over Coney Island by its own lightning-like grapevine.

Chic told briefly what had happened.

"She was a damned fine woman. One of the best kinkers we had. Too bad, too bad."

The leatherlung paused a moment; his manner changed.

"I hear Mr. Zimmerman and Queenie were in swimming together this afternoon. I guess something's going to happen all right. So long, I've got to bally again."

His hat went back on his head, he mounted the platform.

"Now, la-dies and gentle-men, I wish to call to your attention—"

As the subway train rolled along, carrying Chic back to Manhattan, he felt a strange sense of lonesomeness, the worst he had known since he had arrived in New York. It grew on him as he walked through the restless, surging crowds along Broadway as he was going to his hotel. He paused before his box at the hotel desk.

"I'll take my key, please," he said, and in with his key was a letter.

He turned it over casually at first. It had been forwarded a time or two, and was liberally splotched and mysteriously labeled. And then something familiar about the handwriting struck him, and almost before he seemed to have time to realize whose writing it was, he began to tremble.

It was, of course, from Charmian, but what could she be writing him about?

The elevator stopped. His floor.

He started down the hall, the mysterious letter in his hand. Maybe it was a wedding announcement. No, it wasn't square and formal enough for that. But still one could never tell about these newfangled styles.

Click went his key in the door, and getting out his knife he carefully slit the letter. Now he could read it.

CHAPTER XLVII

PARADISE REGAINED

AS he stood with the letter in his hand, he had the curious feeling that Charmian herself was in the room. No, not that, for that would be foolish, but here was a silent emissary from her. Her pen had moved along those lines, her hand had sealed it. And now, by some mysterious and miraculous process the letter was in *his* hand.

But it wasn't much of a letter after all. She had just returned from Europe, where she had been traveling with her mother, and where later her father had joined them.

She had read in the papers of the accident to the top, and in the item she had found his name. She had been sorry, indeed, to hear that things had not gone as he wished them to go, and as soon as she had returned she had

taken this occasion to let him know that she sympathized with him in the unfortunate accident, and hoped that he would soon find something else of a promising nature to interest him.

It was signed: "Very sincerely, Charmian De Ford."

That was all. A letter such as she might have written to a dozen of her friends who had had an unfortunate turn of luck. When he finished reading he felt a sense of disappointment. It was no longer a silent messenger of amazing possibilities, but was reduced to a folded sheet of paper, inclosed in an ordinary envelope which somebody had deposited in a letter box.

But in a moment this disappointment was gone. After all, it was from *her*. She had been thoughtful and generous enough to write him her best wishes. And more than that, she had carried it in her mind during the last part of her stay in Europe, and when she had arrived home distractions hadn't made her forget.

And now he began to see it optimistically. Why, it was really a splendid letter; formal, yes, but still she had wished him well. That was the thing that counted.

That evening he called her on the telephone.

"Is Miss De Ford there? Mr. Cotton."

There was a wait; no faint, ghostly echoes of voices and a restrained hallooing back and forth, but the silence of a well-regulated household, and then suddenly out of nothingness Charmian's voice vibrated in his ear.

"Is this you, Charmian? This is Chic Cotton. How are you? It was quite a surprise to get your note; it was very nice, indeed."

In the days when he had first come to New York, in the Swiss chalet days,

he would have made a mess of it. The words would have become all twisted and tangled, and he would have said things that would have bordered on idiocy, but now he was older. He was excited, yes; it was thrilling to hear her voice again, but now he had more self-possession.

"It was awfully nice of you to send me that note. I don't live in that old rooming house any more, I've been promoted to a hotel, but your letter followed me. It was a tough blow when the top went over, but it's not going to keep me down. I've got some ideas about radio, and am trying to work them out. I think that's my real field after all. The top idea was all right," he paused a moment, picking his phrases. "Everybody has to go through that, I suppose—I don't know whether the idea I'm working on now is going over or not, but some day I'll find something worth while, I think."

Once, there would have been boasting in it—he'd found the biggest thing ever, it was going to make him a millionaire—but now his statements were tempered. He might hit it, he might not, but some day he felt that he would turn up something worth while.

"But that's enough of me," he continued. "Tell me about yourself. How long have you been back? Where did you go?"

There was a pause, after she had told him, and he felt the strain that it must be on her.

He was now free from his promise to Queenie; she was engaged to Zimmerman, and now he could tell Charmian why he had broken their own engagement.

"I wish I could see you, Charmian, there are some things I'd like to tell you. I don't believe you'll think so badly of me when I tell you. It's about

Queenie. I can't tell you now, you'll have to take my word for what I say, but I can tell you one thing—she's engaged to Zimmerman. She should have been from the first," he added. "I think they'll be reasonably happy. They're show people, they see things through the same eyes. Anyway, I know Zimmerman is happy. It's made him over. I understand they're going to Blackpool together for their honeymoon."

As he talked there flashed before him a vision of Zimmerman and Queenie getting on the ship together. He could see the squat, thick-shouldered showman in his exaggerated clothes, his cane dangling from the leather loop over his wrist as he proudly escorted Queenie up the gangplank.

There would be the reporters, but Zimmerman would know how to handle them, for he had played many tunes on them before. Coney Island and his park would get a good run in the papers that day.

And beside him as he talked would be Queenie—pretty, slangy, rough-and-ready Queenie, with the new rings blazing on her fingers. Now the reporters have been given their story about an American amusement park man called to England to install American methods, now the reporters are gone, Zimmerman has lost interest in them.

He takes a camera swinging from a carrying case over his shoulder, and there he stands on the deck, his feet planted apart, a cigar gripped in the corner of his mouth, already, before the whistle blows, snapping pictures of Queenie—

For a moment there was a pang in Chic's heart, and then it passed away. Queenie had been a fascinating girl;

never had he known any one like her—so direct, so completely without pretense, so good-hearted, and yet who at the same time was so "tough," but now that he was older, and had a better grip on life, he realized that she was not the girl for him.

Queenie's grammar was erratic, she was entirely of the show world, and would always be, while he himself would move on a different plane. The time would come when Coney Island would seem like a chapter out of another life.

Chic shivered with ecstasy as he heard Charmian's words—"I missed you so much, dear, so very much!"

As they talked, and as Charmian's personality became more vivid and real, there rose before him the sweet, stirring memory of that autumn day in Junction City when they had driven out into the country together, and the aura of those days surrounded him.

This first boyhood impression would always remain with him, like a colored strand running through a cord. Now he had finished talking; to-morrow evening he was going to see her! *Charmian!*

He felt a sense of happy elation, a strange, silent soaring on invisible wings. To-morrow evening! He wanted motor activity, wanted to stir about a bit. He'd go out and take a walk along Broadway, out in the crowds which used to terrify him so.

Yes, he'd have a lovely little stroll all by himself, and look at the people and think things over. His eyes fell on his gold-headed cane. He'd hardly seen it in months, although it'd been right there in the room. Strange about that.

He picked it up and started down the hall, swinging it jauntily.



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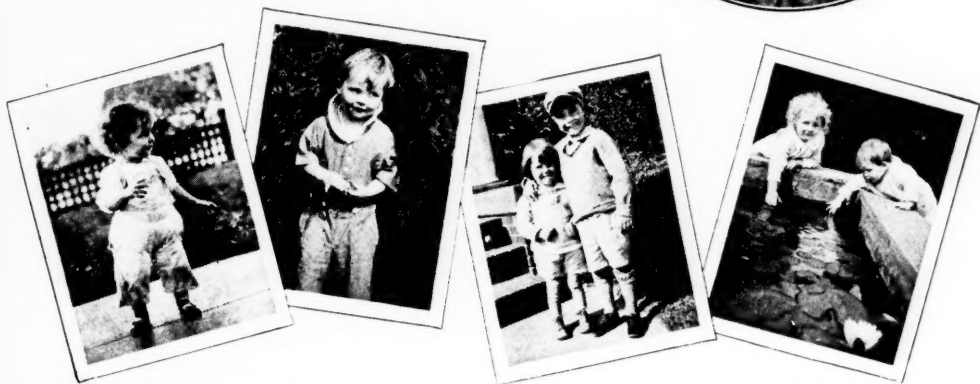
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